JOEY JORDISON 1975-2021

METAL HAMMER

METALLICA

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"HIS HEART WAS AS BIG AS HIS DRUMMING"
- WEDNESDAY 13 -

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Inside the metal fest of the year!

SPIRITBOX
Meet metal's next superstars

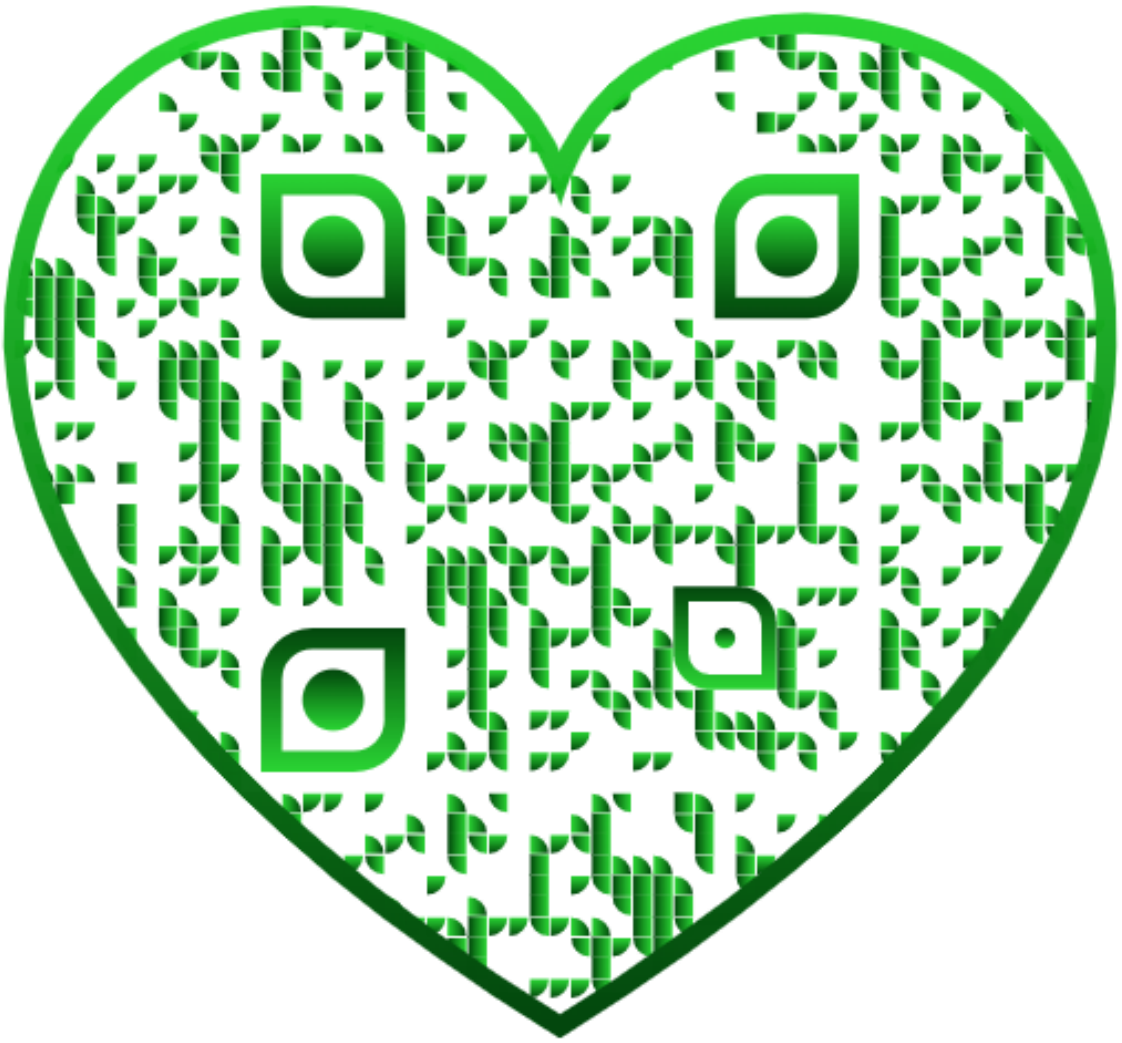
JINJER
Tatiana: "I wish I could go home"

MINISTRY
Uncle Al answers your questions

+

TRIVIUM
SVALBARD
EMPLOYED TO SERVE
ASKING ALEXANDRIA
SLEEP TOKEN
KILLSWITCH ENGAGE

FUTURE
ISSUE 353



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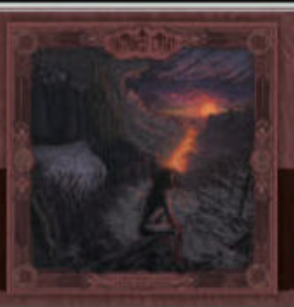

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IT JUST DIDN'T SEEM REAL

WE'D JUST BEEN putting some finishing touches to last month's issue when news broke right around 10pm on a Tuesday night, late in July: Joey Jordison was dead. It didn't seem real then, and now, weeks later, it still doesn't. Joey wasn't just a powerhouse drummer and one of the most technically gifted musicians of his generation; he was an astonishingly talented songwriter, an enduring icon and, more than anything else, a sound dude who truly, deeply loved heavy metal.

To try to surmise Joey's immense career, influence and legacy within the confines of a single issue is a tall task, but thanks to some big assists from his friends, peers and former bandmates, we've put together a tribute to a true modern legend of the scene that we hope will bring you some catharsis, and maybe even a little joy. Because that's what we should be doing most of all: celebrating a life and career like few others associated with this genre. Rest In Power, #1. And thanks.

I'd also like to dedicate this issue to Mat Davies: a lifelong *Metal Hammer* reader, friend of the magazine and beloved member of the UK metal community. You'll be missed, my friend.

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MEET THE BAND

RICH HOBSON
WRITER
We reunited Rich with the one and only Jinjer as they prepared to unleash their immense new album and further stake their claim as one of metal's true heavyweights-in-waiting. And they are very much up for the challenge.

TINA KORHONEN
PHOTOGRAPHER
Think two years out of the festival game would faze our Tina? No chance! This month she got proudly stuck into the returning Bloodstock, capturing all the fun and mayhem as it unfolded across one historic weekend (and more!).

DAVE EVERLEY
WRITER
We got Dave to chat to some of the artists responsible for reimagining Metallica's classic *Black Album*. And yes, it means Rina Sawayama, Diet Cig and Kamasi Washington are in an issue of *Metal Hammer*. Who says we can't still surprise ya?

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Head to p.34 for details

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ASKING ALEXANDRIA

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BETTER NOISE MUSIC

TRAVIS SHINN

IOWA STATE OF MIND

IN 2016, *METAL* *Hammer* headed to Iowa to spend some quality time with Joey Jordison for a world-exclusive cover feature. The resulting cover shoot, handled by longtime Slipknot collaborator Travis Shinn, showed Joey as we'd never seen him before – vulnerable, but defiant as he looked to the future and next chapter of his career. "Finally, I get to tell the truth," he told *Hammer* scribe Dom Lawson, opening up on his health issues and exit from Slipknot for the very first time. "The thing is, you get up in the morning and you look in the mirror, and then you go off and fucking do it," he later added. "You live your life the way you want to, and get the work done! What else can I say? It's good to tell my story." And few lived a story quite like Joey.

TRAVIS SHINN

THE HOT TOPIC

WHAT NEXT?

As UK venues reopen their doors for full-capacity shows, *Hammer* spoke to Music Venues Trust CEO Mark Davyd about the return of live music and how we can all help to keep venue doors open

INTERVIEW: ELEANOR GOODMAN • WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURE: GETTY

ASIDE FROM BLOODSTOCK and test events like Download Pilot, it has been almost 500 days since UK music venues last held full-capacity shows. But as the final restrictions in England ease, gigs as we once knew them are starting to return.

The past 17 months have represented an extraordinarily difficult time for the music industry, affecting everybody from road-crew and promoters to bands, ticket agents and venue staff. Nobody knows the extent of these challenges more than the Music Venues Trust (MVT), a UK-based charity that assists in protecting, securing and improving grassroots venues, working with independent businesses across the nation to ensure they have the support to thrive and foster new talent.

"In April last year, we predicted that 80%+ of the sector would not survive the crisis," says Mark Davyd, the CEO of MVT. "The equation is pretty easy to understand: 93% of our operators are tenants in their buildings, they owe rent to somebody else. All the income to pay that rent evaporated on March 16, 2020 and since then they've had no real commercial income. If you don't have an income but still have taxes, services and a building, staff you're worried about… that's where the saying about income versus outgoings comes in. Just in England alone, we were looking at around 557 venues closing down."

Such extensive closures could have dealt a death blow to many local communities that are almost entirely centred around local, independent venues. Luckily, the industry itself rallied throughout 2020. Initiatives launched by MVT like 'Save Our Venues' and 'The Writing is on The Wall' helped to raise money directly for the venues most at risk, while the public outcry at the lack of support for the arts ultimately opened through-roads for government funding, recovery packages and consideration in the reopening of public events.

"It's been a remarkable 18 months," Mark says. "The struggle to prevent venues from permanently closing down has been unbelievably difficult. We thought 80% of these venues would close down and ultimately less than 1% of them did. It's been a life-affirming experience; we've seen an enormous outpouring of not just words, but people taking direct action to stop venues being closed. The public helped raise over £5 million directly for the venues, but there were also more 100,000 people who sent letters to their local MPs, local authorities and engage with campaigns. Government support arriving in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland only happened because the public spoke up."

Testament to the sheer determination of music fans and the importance of live music on our lives as a whole, such campaigns ultimately kept the damage to a minimum. But now venues are open, the power of the individual is even more crucial than ever. While Mark admits there isn't a 'one cure fits all' approach that can be appropriated by everybody, there are still plenty of things that music fans can do to ensure the safety of themselves and others.

"Just because shows are allowed to go ahead doesn't necessarily mean they're able to," Mark says. "We're hoping the experience will look similar to what we had before the pandemic, but [in every venue] there will be control measures that you won't necessarily see.

Let's not fuck this up, people!

COVID ICONS: MVT

"WE ESTIMATE VENUES HAVE LOST NEARLY £80 MILLION COLLECTIVELY"

"We're encouraging music fans to really think about their own responsibility. Think of the moshpit – when somebody falls, you don't leave them lying there. That's what we need to do as a community. Lateral flow tests are completely free and give you confidence you aren't potentially contributing to the problem. We're not telling you that you need a COVID passport as that's contentious, but what we *are* saying is that you as a music fan can personally do things to ensure these shows can go ahead, from taking those lateral flows to wearing masks and washing your hands. If you *are* ill, don't bring an airborne pathogen into the venue, because we want these shows to continue!"

While many are understandably still avoiding indoor rock shows, Mark has another message for those taking their first tentative steps back to gigs.

"Buying merchandise and memorabilia from venues can really help, too – we estimate venues have lost nearly £80 million collectively, so everything helps." Mark also has a more fundamental motto about our next steps that transcend even gigs themselves.

"Above all though, we want everyone to work by the motto 'be kind'. That goes for staff, for crew and for bands, but also for each other. Just checking on each other can really make a difference. If we all just use mosh etiquette in everything else we do, we'll be just fine."

So there you have it – being kind is metal, it's official.

FOR MORE INFO ON HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT THE RETURN OF LIVE MUSIC, HEAD OVER TO WWW.MUSICVENUETRUST.COM

GETTY

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What's been blowing our tiny brains

ERIC WAGNER RIP
The former Trouble frontman and doom legend passed away last month at the age of 62. Rest In Power, sir.

THIS PANDEMIC IS FAR FROM OVER
Numerous bands continue to pull live dates, and numerous prominent artists continue to test positive for COVID. Stay safe, everyone.

IS THE NEW BIZKIT ALBUM COMING?
It's about eight years late now, lads...

METALLICA KNOW HOW TO DO ANNIVERSARIES
And no, we're still not sick of all these *Black Album* covers

Eric Wagner: RIP

RILEY GALE'S MEMORY LIVES ON
A year after his death, The Riley Gale Foundation has been launched to support LGBTQ+ orgs, animal rescue shelters and mental health initiatives.

SLIPKNOT ARE COMING TO EUROPE NEXT YEAR!
Although no UK date, yet. Can we have that Knotfest back, please?

FOO FIGHTERS ARE GLOBAL ICONS
According to MTV anyway, who are giving them the aforementioned award at this year's VMAs. We're not arguing!

JASON NEWSTED IS A LEGEND
Don't miss his recent *Metal Hammer* Podcast interview. It's a belter!

CRADLE OF FILTH AND ED SHEERAN?
According to Dani Filth, it could happen. Even if absolutely no one asked for it.

BLOODSTOCK 2022 LOOKS EPIC
Lamb Of God! Mercyful Fate! Dimmu! Testament! Is it August again yet?

Jason Newsted: check out the podcast!

WAS THE PAIN OF YOUR FACIAL PIERCINGS WORTH IT?

Al Jourgensen has manned industrial legends Ministry for four decades, surviving near-death experiences, wild tours and industry bullshit – but can he survive your questions?

WORDS: ALI COOPER • PICTURES DERICK SMITH

MINISTRY MASTERMIND AL JOURGENSEN has seen it all in his 40-year musical career, from epic line-ups and legendary tour antics to losing bandmates and friends around him. With Uncle Al's industrial brainchild unleashing their lockdown-fuelled album *Moral Hygiene* in October, we turned to the *Metal Hammer* readers to pit the craziest questions to the man himself, from his memories of touring with the late Joey Jordison to how it *really* felt getting a face full of piercings in one sitting.

Ministry had Joey Jordison drum with them in '06 – what are your memories of that tour, and at that point had you already resolved to retire Ministry after the 'C U LaTour'?
Rich Hobson (Facebook)

"I felt like retiring Ministry on the Rio Grande Blood tour every other show because it was the craziest line-up ever: Tommy Victor on guitar, Mike Scaccia on guitar, myself, John Bechdel and Paul Raven. The antics on that tour are definitely worthy of a book or a TV miniseries with that amount of egos, intelligence, really sarcastic humour and not really giving a fuck. Every other day, somebody would be too fucked-up to play and our shows would suck, then the next night it would be absolutely magical. It pretty much started with Joey, depending on how fucked-up he was that night – if he turned up with a couple of hookers and a bag of cocaine, we knew we were in for a bad show."

Do you listen to classical music? If so, who's your fave composer?
@DarkGullRecords (Twitter)

"Yes, but my classical music training, observance and listening habits are off the map. I really like Russian composers because of their darkness and understanding the times that they were living in when they wrote it. I tend to shy away from the popular stuff like Liszt and Mozart, I think they're the Flock Of Seagulls of their time. I also find some of the contemporary stuff that mixes in jazz time signatures fascinating. It's like math rock or Rush, you're just showing off at that point."

Al Jourgensen: still alive and faintly surprised about it

What made you change from synth to rock?
@simonparrock (Twitter)

"We basically never changed, that was a record label decision. For our first record, they signed me on the stuff I'd written that eventually ended up on *Twitch* and *The Land Of Rape And Honey*, but they didn't want any part of that and they just assigned us producers and back-up musicians – they even wrote lyrics for me. The producers were hellbent on making it an early 80s synth-pop record. They had me cut my hair, bought me a whole new wardrobe of sharkskin suits because they wanted me to be Wham! or whatever was selling that day. I didn't sign up for this shit!

"I don't even count that as a Ministry record. It's good for what it is, but it's not like we changed from synth to rock – that's the contract we were under and as soon as we were out of it, we became Ministry. That was a rude awakening to the perils of the music industry. It was like getting in an Uber and the driver gets lost, so I've gotta pull out the GPS and find out where we're going."

Mozart? Liszt? Here's what
Al thinks of *those* losers

"EVERY OTHER DAY, SOMEBODY WOULD BE TOO FUCKED-UP TO PLAY"

Behold! The enemy of airport metal detectors everywhere

"I'M GLAD WE GOT THE THUMBS-UP FROM IGGY POP"

Forty years is a long time for a band. Did you ever imagine keeping it going for this long when you first started?
@CAJ_310 (Twitter)
"I never imagined being alive this long, let alone keeping a band! I seriously thought, before it was hip to be in the 27 Club, that I would be in it – but somehow at 62, I'm still here and actually quite happy. Life has kinda grown on me. I was hesitant to keep trying this experiment called 'life on Planet Earth' but as I've got older and everyone else is dying around me – also recently losing two friends of mine in Joey Jordison and Dusty Hill – you start thinking, 'I guess I'm staying here, so I might as well make the best of it.'"

Poppadoms or bread?
@tim_bolitho (Twitter)
"For me, it'd be the poppadom, or what we call English muffins here. I put all my burgers and breakfast on English muffins, but when I eat any type of curry, I go with the poppadom."

When you got all your facial piercings to prove you're not a pussy to your daughter, was the pain worth it?
Ruby Lloyd (Email)
"There was no pain, it's literally just like slapping your wrist real quick. I'm sure there's sensitive areas that are a lot more acute to pain than where I got them around my eyebrows and nose, but it wasn't that bad at all. In fact, that same day I made my daughter get a full sleeve and I got all my piercings to have a tattoo-off, she was the one crying. I was like, 'Whatever, man, give me more! Wanna give me a Prince Albert? I'm ready, give it to me!' The best part is she'll regret her tattoos for the rest of her life but I can take my piercings out – revenge was sweet and it was served cold as I only got a few puncture holes in my face."

At a show a few years back, I asked you what your favourite Hank Williams Sr song was. You asked me to come backstage after the show to answer, but I never made it back because I got too hammered from the kick-ass concert!
@elvisthomas8 (Twitter)
"It's gotta be *Your Cheatin' Heart*: those opening guitar chords transcend eras and take you someplace else. I know he has 144 published songs and of course I chose the most obvious one, and not all of his stuff is good, but those opening chords transport you to the 1940s and 50s, and that's powerful in music – if you can do that in any song in any genre, you're doing a good job."

Which one of your tattoos would you say is your favourite?
Mark Vella (Email)
"I gotta go with my neck, which is Chicago, LA and El Paso, which are the three most influential cities that I've lived in; they shaped my course in life and kept me alive."

Are we waiting for a new musical project by Ministry?
@Cuervot1lla (Twitter)
"Yeah! *Moral Hygiene* comes out on October 1 and it's a pretty damn good record. I'm really proud of it and happy with it. There's also going to be some new Lard material coming out since I have a studio in my house, and that's all I did during quarantine. We also have 10 songs for a new Ministry record as soon as I get around to putting vocals on it, but I get very pernickety about vocals – I wanna see what's going on around me before I start yapping. I'm just glad that we got the thumbs-up from Iggy Pop; he's the first person I sent our cover of *Search And Destroy* and I said, 'What do you think, Iggy? Should we put it on the record?' He was like, 'Hell yeah, man! I've heard 100 covers of that but this one is pretty strange!' If he's happy with it, I'm happy with it."

If you could go back and relive any era from Ministry, Revolting Cocks or Lard, which would you revisit?
Debbie Long (Email)
"Definitely the Rio Grande Blood tour – we've lost three of the six mates that were there. I just sent Tommy Victor a photo of Joey, Paul and Mikey with the caption, 'Who's next, man? Any volunteers?' That tour was not only infuriating, but also the most gratifying of any tour I've ever done in my life. It was incredible how it somehow worked out, it's such a great feeling and I hope that's the feeling on my deathbed: that somehow all this crazy shit worked out." H

MINISTRY'S NEW ALBUM, *MORAL HYGIENE*, WILL BE RELEASED ON OCTOBER 1 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST

PRESS

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THE SLAYLIST

SERENA CHERRY

The Svalbard and Noctule mastermind talks shredders, expansive extreme metal and being a power metal nerd

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURE: JOHN ASHBY

Serena Cherry: in awe of Floor

"I WENT TO the first Download in 2003 and one of my strongest memories was watching **ARCH ENEMY**. Seeing Angela Gossow live was one of the first times I'd seen a woman doing extreme metal vocals and that definitely lit a fire in me. I'm also a real sucker for dual guitar leads – that influences my playing a lot. I always wanted to play like Michael Amott and have a great time learning to play songs like *Enemy Within* on guitar. It was quite different when I tried to learn one of **SYMPHONY X**'s songs – I ending up crying, they're so hard! Michael Romeo is basically not human; he's got that technical prowess but doesn't compromise the actual songwriting. Symphony X are really well rounded and you can really hear that on ballads like *When All Is Lost*.

Obsidian C. of **KEEP OF KALESSIN** is my biggest guitar influence, he gets into flamenco picking styles and incorporates that into his shredding. He's incredibly versatile and his sense of melody is epic, but also incredibly dark. *Armada* is their pièce de résistance – it falls under that wider black metal category, but they're more open and branch out into wider extreme metal. The band have even done Eurovision, they're so expansive! **AMARANTHE** should definitely enter Eurovision. I saw them supporting Powerwolf years ago and at the time I'd have described them as a guilty pleasure, but now I think you should never be ashamed of loving the things you enjoy. They're pop metal and absolutely unashamed of that; they always put me in a great mood.

I'm basically a massive power metal nerd and love music where I can headbang with a massive smile on my face. I love **ORDEN OGAN** for that reason – the verses of an Orden Ogan song could be the choruses in another band! They're so catchy but toe the line just right to not become too cheesy. I absolutely love the new album. The track *Let The Fire Rain* is probably my favourite. I'm so excited to see them when they tour. I also really enjoy **NICK CAVE** – my favourite album is *No More Shall We Part*, which he did with the Bad Seeds. I love the title track. The dark romanticism of his lyrics, the piano playing, the rich textures of his voice… he's a true artist and I'm a really big fan of the Bad Seeds violinist Warren Ellis, too – his playing is so soulful, especially on that album.

LISTEN NOW
Head to **tinyurl.com/SerenaSlaylist** to listen to Serena's mix

It feels like now's the time for exciting British underground music. I love how diverse it all is. You can have an incredible technical death metal band like Venom Prison, more hardcore-inspired stuff like Employed To Serve and then Svalbard… miscellaneous! I'm really loving **EMPLOYED TO SERVE**'s new track, *Mark Of The Grave*. There are a lot more clean vocals on there than we've heard in the past and it's got this Mastodon-style riffing and a great video to boot!

Great guitar parts are often what will grab me most about a band. I'm such a sucker for a great lead [guitar] and *Immortal* from the new **LORNA SHORE** album is incredible. I'm not usually into the deathcore scene, but they've been my gateway band ushering me into that side of things. The drumming, the vocals… it's all sick. I love the effect that music can have. Whenever I'm dying at the gym, I get a bit of **PARKWAY DRIVE** on. *Karma* has become my go-to gym song. I love the positivity in their lyrics, the riffing… support the underdogs! Even though they're massive, they're still underrated and I'm not sure how that even happens.

I love **NIGHTWISH**'s *Ghost Love Score*, particularly the live version at Wacken with Floor Jansen. Floor's the best vocalist in metal, hands down. She can do the screams, the opera, the soft cleans… she's so versatile but brings such heart and soul to everything she does vocally. She's a powerhouse and seeing her take on a 12-minute song and make it her own, especially towards the end where she just lets go and starts belting that chorus – it's the pinnacle of metal." H

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LIFE LESSONS

JØRN 'NECROBUTCHER' STUBBERUD

False rumours, controversies and the joys of being a grandad – unsurprisingly, the bassist and founding member of Norwegian black metal legends Mayhem has learned a lot in life

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PICTURE: STEFEN RADUTA

"EURONYMOUS WAS A FUCKING ASSHOLE"

MAYHEM BASSIST JØRN 'Necrobutcher' Stubberud is an extreme metal lifer. Aside from a three-year period in the early 90s, the 53-year-old bassist has steered the Norwegian icons since founding the band in 1984. Today, he's the band's longest-serving member, weathering the deaths of both former singer Per 'Dead' Ohlin and guitarist Øystein 'Euronymous' Aarseth, as well as numerous controversies over the years. This is what life has taught him.

I HAD TO GROW UP QUICKLY

"I'm not the kind of guy who goes, 'I had this traumatic childhood', but some things forced me to grow up years before I should have and take a bit more responsibility for my life. Growing up without a dad, I ended up in the wrong kind of crowd. I grew up around thugs and criminals, guys who were doing the wrong things – breaking into places, stealing cars, doing amphetamines. When you grow up with these people, you need to be street smart otherwise you'll be killed. So I got street smart quickly."

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE – UP TO A POINT

"On the outside, I'm a calm, polite guy. Maybe a little bit too polite, because sometimes I think to myself, 'I should have to told that guy to fuck off instead of chatting along.'"

INVEST WISELY

"Other musicians spend all their money on drugs and women. Some people would say that's a wise investment. Me, I was smart – I invested in real estate in the early 90s. I only bought a simple house – more like a cabin. We weren't bringing in Iron Maiden or Metallica money, so I couldn't afford more. But I still live in it. Of course I have upgraded it – now it's worth millions in Norwegian money. Real estate is the only thing that grows in value."

DON'T LET PEOPLE REWRITE YOUR HISTORY

"People say I left Mayhem. That's wrong. I started the band, I drew the logo and I brought in Øystein [aka Euronymous]. He was a fucking asshole, he took pictures of a dead friend's corpse [singer Dead, who died by suicide in 1991]. I said, 'Burn those fucking pictures before even calling me.' He didn't. Then guess what? He turned everything around and called this murderer to replace me [Varg Vikernes, aka Count Grishnackh]. Everybody knows that story. I left Mayhem? I never fucking left Mayhem. I'm tired of this misunderstanding all the fucking time."

NEVER FORGET THE FALLEN

"I think about Dead and Euronymous a lot, 'cos I get reminded every day by people asking questions about them. I like it that people are still talking about these guys who only got to be 22 and 25 years old. But they were just two of the people I know who died. I grew up in a rough neighbourhood where shitloads of people died – drug overdoses, car accidents, suicides. I remember all of those guys well, but no one else apart from their families know who they were. They were my friends too."

TECHNOLOGY SUCKS

"Everybody knows you should stay the fuck away from all that social media. I was the last guy with a cellphone. I was the last guy on the internet. All the guys in the band were, like, 'You've got to go on fucking Facebook!' No, I don't! But in the end, they persuaded me to communicate with Messenger. What did it bring me in the end? Just a bunch of fucking loonies out there who now have a chance to reach me."

MAYHEM ARE THE ROLLING STONES OF METAL

"I realised that I have the same strategy as Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones. He understands it's important to be the first Western band in any country. When you get there, you are the gods even if the people who come after you are better than you. I love to be the first metal band in any country. We want to play Laos, Vietnam, Philippines, Pakistan. Afghanistan? Maybe not. They jailed a metal band for 10 years for blasphemy. I'm not ready to go all that way and risk ending up in an Afghan jail."

GET A MANAGER

"I was the manager of Mayhem until three years ago. I had to give it up because there was no appreciation – people just took things for granted after a while, and it drove me crazy. So we hired a manager for the band. Now people are complaining that thousands of pounds are disappearing in management fees. I think, 'That's money I could have taken to do the job before.'"

FAMILY FIRST

"I enjoy being a dad. I enjoy being a grandad even more. I had a daughter when I was 23. That changes you. I had to look at myself and think, 'I need to provide for her, I need to have a house and I need a better car so I can pick her up in the kindergarten without calling the child protection service.' Now I have a grandson – he's named Jørn after me, so I must have done something right. We call him Junior. It's like having a kid, but less responsibility and more fun. He's not a fan of Mayhem, though. Not yet."

MAYHEM MAKE BLUE-COLLAR MUSIC THAT'S FOR WORKING-CLASS PEOPLE

"I went to a junkyard years ago, and I'm trying to pay the guy and he goes, 'Your money's no good. Mayhem doesn't need to pay here.' Another time a guy came to unblock the sewer. He parks his truck and walks out in a Satyricon shirt. I think, 'That's the wrong shirt', so I go in and get him a Mayhem shirt. He goes, 'I knew you were living here, I was

Jørn Stubberud: the Mick Jagger of metal?

Jørn and Mayhem – pigs' heads not pictured

"PEOPLE COMPARE ME TO LARS ULRICH BECAUSE I'M A SMALL GUY AND I GO BALLISTIC ALL THE TIME"

just trying to act cool.' They're my guys – the ones who work in the sewer plant and the fucking junkyard. I sometimes wish they worked at the local bank or on the airline desk at the airport! Ha ha!"

I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT FAME IS

"Do I feel famous? I don't think so. My 10-year-old grandson doesn't think I'm famous. He sees his grandad onstage and on TV and in the papers all the time, so he thinks it's normal. But if his teachers see me when I go to pick him up at school, they get shaky knees. So maybe I am famous. Who knows?"

IT'S OK TO LOSE YOUR SHIT SOMETIMES

"Many people compare me to Lars Ulrich. That's because I'm a small guy and I go ballistic all the time. Why? Because somebody has to go ballistic, but only when things go wrong – like when we are assured that the backline is supposed to be at the venue but it's not. I'm not the kind of guy who goes ballistic because I asked for a bunch of M&Ms and the blue ones are still in there."

A FEW PIGS' HEADS WILL GO A LONG WAY

"We had a gig in 1985 and we ordered four pigs' heads. But the gig was cancelled so we still had these pigs' heads. So I put them in my grandmother's freezer and they stayed there for a year. We took them out for a photo session. One of the pictures later ended up on a single called *Ancient Skin* [from 1997]. We always used pigs' heads then as a shock effect. It had nothing to do with animal cruelty – those pigs were already dead. We don't order pigs' heads anymore. Sometimes promoters provide us with pigs' heads when we don't even ask for them. They see the rider and go, 'Where's the pigs' heads?'"

WHERE MAYHEM LEAD, OTHERS FOLLOW

"After we used pigs' heads, a lot of bands started to copy it. I saw that Gorgoroth had 100 sheep heads onstage. We used to have all these pyros and torches, then Rammstein came out and blew everything away. After that I started to think, 'Every bomb that went off was £500 going up in flames.'"

SPREAD YOURSELF WIDE

"Mayhem were the underdogs who made it against all the odds, and I'm an entrepreneur who made something out of nothing. You can transfer that to anything – the business world, the art world, anything. I'm a published author [Necrobutcher wrote 2018's *The Death Archives: 1984-1994*]; that brings in extra revenue and it also brings in a lot of offers to do talk shows, debates, a lot of weird things. I know to expect the unexpected. When you have that kind of mind, you can deal with anything."

SPIRITUAL BELIEFS ARE FOR OTHER PEOPLE

"It's not that I have a closed mind. I'm open for everything. If there was any sign of a messiah coming back, what a fucking event that would be! Or life after death – you wake up and all your dead friends and relatives are there. Let's party! But no. You lose consciousness, you die and that's it."

IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT

"Just because you've been doing something for a long time, you don't suddenly go off and think you're great. I'm the most steady guy I know. I've been living in the same fucking house since 1993. The people I meet who I haven't seen for a long time say, 'Fuck, you haven't changed at all.' But why change a winning formula?"

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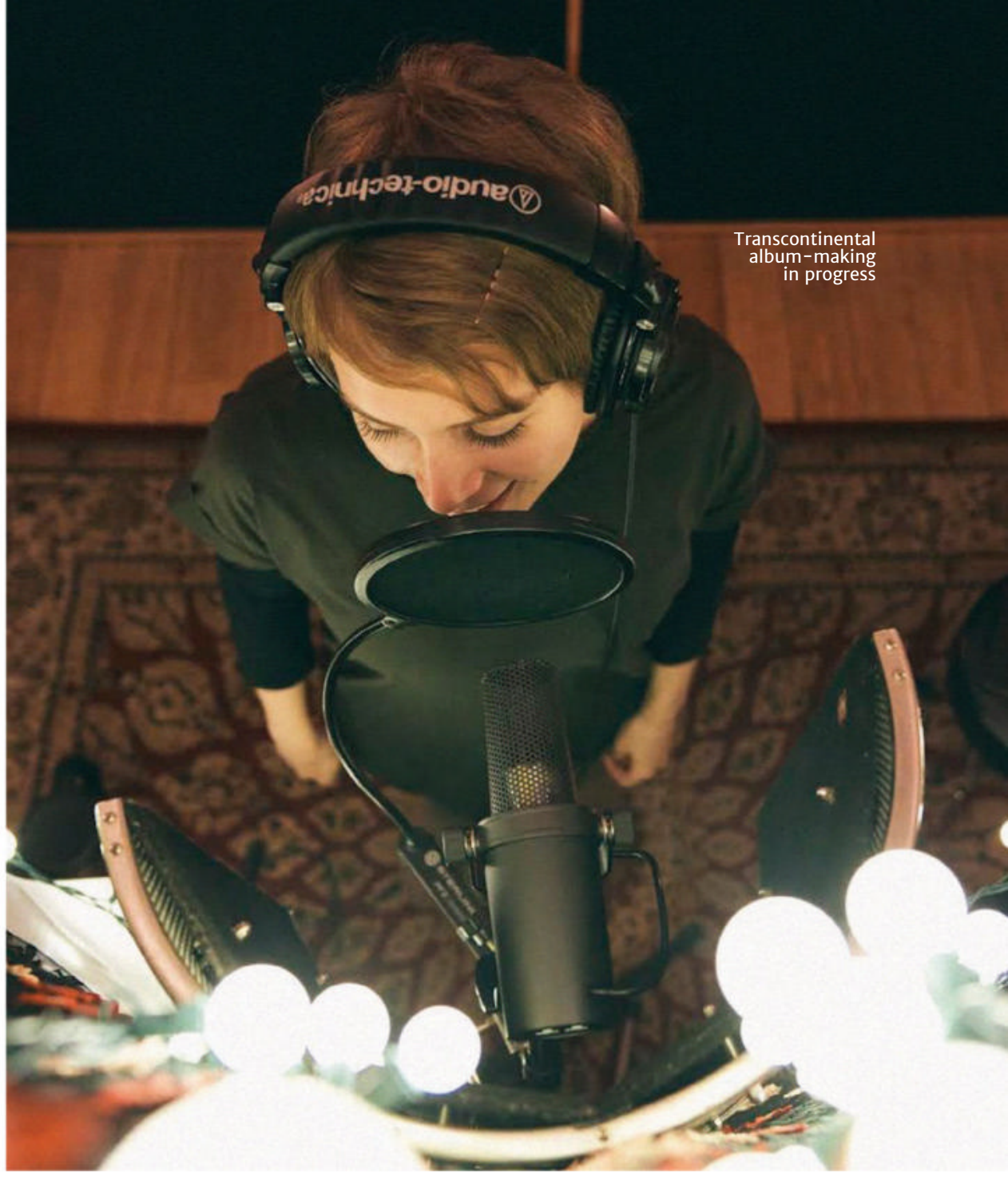

Transcontinental album-making in progress

IN THE STUDIO

ROLO TOMASSI

Expect more ambience and beauty from Sheffield's post-hardcore beloveds this time – and some fat fucking riffs

WORDS: MATT MILLS

ROLO TOMASSI HAVE become inimitable. In the three years since their magnum opus, *Time Will Die And Love Will Bury It*, none have emulated the album's dynamic post-hardcore. In creating full-length #6, the luminaries not only have to one-up their masterpiece, they must do so with singer Eva Korman stuck in the USA thanks to COVID. Luckily, being 4,000 miles apart has only amplified their perfectionist tendencies.

What are we getting, when are we getting it and what should we expect?
James Spence (keys/vocals): "The first single, *Cloaked*, is already out. We're gonna release a couple more singles later this year, as well as the album title and when it's gonna be released. In terms of what to expect, it takes what we enjoyed about the last record and pushes it to the limit. I think there's a lot more space for melodic moments. There's a lot of piano and sparse moments as well. With every record we do, we ramp up the contrasts; that's true more than ever on this album."

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
Six

STUDIO:
The Ranch, Southampton, UK (instruments) / Brady Street, New Jersey, USA (vocals)

PRODUCER:
Lewis Johns with additional engineering by Mikhail Marinas

EXPECT:
Progressive hardcore that'll shatter as many boundaries as it does eardrums

***Cloaked* has such a meaty, djenty guitar tone. How representative is that of the rest of the album?**
James: "It's definitely representative of the production. The record sounds really big and dense. I think it's the first time Nathan [Fairweather, bass] and Chris [Cayford, guitars] tuned down to, like, C or B. That riff was one of the first things Chris wrote for the record and we knew that's the single, even in the early stages: 'Don't change anything! We need to lead with something like that!' As heavy and djenty as it is, there's a definite pop structure to it. It's indicative of so much of the rest of the record, but there's so much breadth to what we've done."

One of the best things about *Time Will Die...* is how it ebbs and flows; each song segues so smoothly into the next. Will that carry on?
Eva Korman (vocals): "The track listing was something we were back and forth about. On *Time Will Die...*, as soon as those songs were finished, it made sense in the order it was in; it left us no other choice. This one gave us a lot more to think about to make sure it flowed in the way we wanted it to. It didn't come together as easily."

How does the new album compare lyrically and thematically?
Eva: "This new record, *Time Will Die...* and [2015 album] *Grievances* come under the same umbrella; they're an unintentional trilogy. *Grievances* came from a very dark place. A lot of *Time Will Die...* was about reflection, forgiveness and letting go. Writing this one, I felt that I had reflected. It's a lot more about renewal and rebirth."

Eva, you wrote and recorded in the US while the rest of the band were in the UK. What was that like?
Eva: "I feel like it pushed us to be more organised than we'd ever been when it came to writing. Usually, during that time, James and I work together very closely with vocals and lyrics. This time around, it wasn't something we could do in person; it was just a lot of back and forth with demos. It ended up being a good learning process."

What moment on this album are you the most proud of?
James: "This is so selfish of me, but there's a piano outro on the third song, *Mutual Ruin*, and it's my favourite piece of music I've ever written. When you go to record something, you have a clear idea in your head of what you want it to be and it doesn't always match. This sounds exactly like it was supposed to. I went, 'Oh my God, that's it! I've been trying to make that for five or six years!'"

ROLO TOMASSI'S SIXTH ALBUM IS EXPECTED FOR EARLY 2022 VIA EONE

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THE STORY BEHIND

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO SUICIDE BY ORANGE GOBLIN

Songs about wizards and the cosmos were out, and the plague was in. But Orange Goblin's grimmest record also set them up for some of their happiest moments

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

Orange Goblin (left to right): Chris Turner, Ben Ward, Martyn Millard, Joe Hoare

THE BRITISH STONER/DOOM scene owes a debt of gratitude to Orange Goblin. Black Sabbath may have set the tone for doom-soaked riffing in the early 70s, but the UK had fallen behind its Atlantic cousins in the decades since, with bands like Witchfinder General, Acrimony and even Cathedral existing as sole pillars adrift in a musical sea. But by the mid-90s the tides were changing. The Peaceville Three (Paradise Lost, Anathema and My Dying Bride) established a beach-head for new British grimness, while independent label Rise Above records blew the doors wide open. Founded by Cathedral mainman Lee Dorrian in 1988, the label served as a rallying point for the UK's underground stoner and doom talent, with Orange Goblin and Electric Wizard, formed in 1995 and 1993, leading the charge.

But in 2006, a decade and five albums in, Orange Goblin wanted *more*. That year they amicably parted ways with Rise Above, inking a new deal with Sanctuary Records in the hopes it would propel them to new heights. "Sanctuary was a label set up by Iron Maiden's management and they were really supportive of what we were doing," Orange Goblin vocalist Ben Ward remembers. "We were young and hungry so we wanted to impress them with something we hadn't done before."

THE FACTS

RELEASED: 2007

ALBUM: *Healing Through Fire*

PERSONNEL: Ben Ward (vocals), Joe Hoare (guitars), Martyn Millard (bass), Chris Turner (drums), Jason Graham (keyboards), Honkeyfinger (harmonica)

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: N/A

While the band weren't about to throw away their tried-and-tested riff-loaded sound, a decision was made early on to go harder and darker than they had previously. "The vibe of the record lent itself to a more metal edge," Ben says. "The whole theme and the lyrics were more aggressive than what we'd done in terms of fantasy lyrics in the past, particularly on the first album, *Frequencies From Planet Ten*, which was a lot of wizards and dragons you'd hear Dio sing about."

While Dio was out (for the moment, at least), Ben found another set of heavy metal icons to draw inspiration from. "Everything important I've learned about history I got from Iron Maiden lyrics!" Ben grins. "We'd been looking at ideas for what to do [on the album] and had gone on a few London Walks, where you get a guide to show you around historic sites in London. It was a good excuse to have a piss-up on a Friday night, get a bottle of whiskey in your pocket and go for a walk around the streets of London, find out amazing things.

"On one of those walks we went down Monument and Pudding Lane, and the tour guide explained that was where the great fire [of London] started and it was what brought an end to the bubonic plague. It really struck a chord with me and I thought it had some potential for some heavy metal storytelling. After that, I started reading books like *A Journal of the Plague Year* by Daniel Defoe and all this other literature that helped shape the songs."

Diving into history in a way that would do Bruce Dickinson and the boys proud, Orange Goblin set out to make *Healing Through Fire* as a concept record, but to also ensure the songs could stand strong in their own right. It didn't hurt that they weren't over-stretching too much in capturing the squalid conditions of 17th Century London. "At the time we were rehearsing in this dingy little archway under a station," Ben says. "It was very damp and rat infested, so it made us feel we were familiar with what London was like during the plague! It was an inspiring place to write, just because it was so dirty and grimy."

A brief break from the Big Smoke in May 2006 gave them the chance to start demoing new material. Arriving in the US ahead of a planned tour with Scissorfight, the band went into a Boston studio to demo and record the first track for what would become album opener *The Ballad of Solomon Eagle*. If there was any worry their change in tack would upset their new label however, it was quickly squashed. "They loved it!" Ben smiles. "Because we were looking into the history of London, people could research and find things out for themselves, so in

PRESS

that regard it was pretty similar to what Iron Maiden do."

Buoyed by label support, the band came home from the tour itching to get the last few tracks written around their new concept. Oftentimes, the songs would be based around real-life characters featured in historical records, or otherwise on incidents and places of significance during the plague. But album closer *Beginner's Guide to Suicide* was closer to the material Orange Goblin had dealt with in the past, hatched from Ben's imagination.

"*The Ballad of Solomon Eagle* is a mad prophet who used to run around with a vat of boiling oil on his head proclaiming the end of the world," he explains. "*Hounds Ditch* is where all the animals that died of plague were buried, *Mortlake* is in West London and where they buried a lot of the dead… But *Beginner's Guide To Suicide* was originally just a title I liked that popped into my head. It was about people who would rather take the easy way out than get the plague and have a slow, miserable death – they'd just poison themselves."

The song also marked a departure from Orange Goblin's usual sonic fare, slowing the tempo right down whilst turning the bluesy fuzz right the way up to almost sludge levels. "Oh yeah, it was a pretty big departure musically," Ben agrees. "Joe [Hoare, guitar] had this great lazy blues riff, this dark Southern blues done in an almost Nick Cave way. The song really drove home this idea of people being so tired of living in such miserable circumstances. London at the time would most certainly have been miserable with death and famine, plague and everything else on your doorstep. The fire really was a godsend to get rid of it."

"WE WERE REHEARSING IN THIS RAT-INFESTED ARCHWAY UNDER A STATION"

Dour as its subject matter was, Orange Goblin still had fun while in the studio. "We recorded in a studio in London in Old Street, not too far from where the things we were singing about occurred," Ben says. "We were in the heart of London, so we'd stop by the Crobar frequently and have guests back in the studio, which could get a bit messy. It was a lot of fun, but we got fucked up more than we should have."

Not all of their guests were there to party, mind. *Beginner's Guide To Suicide* in particular benefitted from additional touches of harmonica and keys, recorded by guest musicians Honkeyfinger and Jason Graham. "We'd become friends with this guy

Ben Ward: London lad

"WE'D NEVER HAD HARMONICA ON AN ALBUM BEFORE"

Johnny [Halifax] who played as the artist Honkeyfinger, so we got him to play harmonica on the song," Ben says. "We'd never had harmonica on an album before, so it was different and exciting when he started coming out with ideas in the studio. Jason also put keys on there, so it felt more extravagant than your average Orange Goblin song."

On the surface, *Healing Through Fire* didn't particularly catapult Orange Goblin into new stratospheres of fame and fortune. It did, however, put the band firmly on the radar, affording them fresh opportunities. "People felt we'd gone quiet in that period between 2007 and 2012 because we weren't releasing any albums," Ben admits. "But in reality, *Healing Through Fire* set us up; we were constantly touring around Europe, the UK and America. We did Download for the first time and got to do Roadburn – that was all off the strength of *Healing*..."

The band also got to make their triumphant return to arenas, supporting Heaven And Hell for two shows in Poland. "Those shows were the highlight of that whole touring period," Ben says. "We'd just finished soundchecking in this enormous venue in Katowice called the Spodek and were going to the dressing room. As we walked down the corridor I hear 'Ben!' and I turned round, it was Ronnie James Dio! He not only remembered my name from when we supported him in 2001, but wanted to ask how things were going and how I was. It was bizarre, but made you realise what an awesome guy he was."

Although for much of its release *Healing Through Fire* has been out of print physically (Sanctuary becoming defunct in 2007 shortly after the album's release), it still remains beloved by fans. "Even now, we still play a lot of those *Healing Through Fire* tracks live because the fans love to hear them," Ben says. "It's really stood the test of time."

Don't expect the band to bust out *Beginner's Guide...* itself out too often, though. "The song really relies on the harmonica and steel lap guitar parts – it's a little too hard to play," Ben admits. "We did do it at Desertfest in London a few years back, where we had a keyboard player, second guitarist and people really loved it."

Well, 2.6 million streams (on Spotify alone), can't be wrong.

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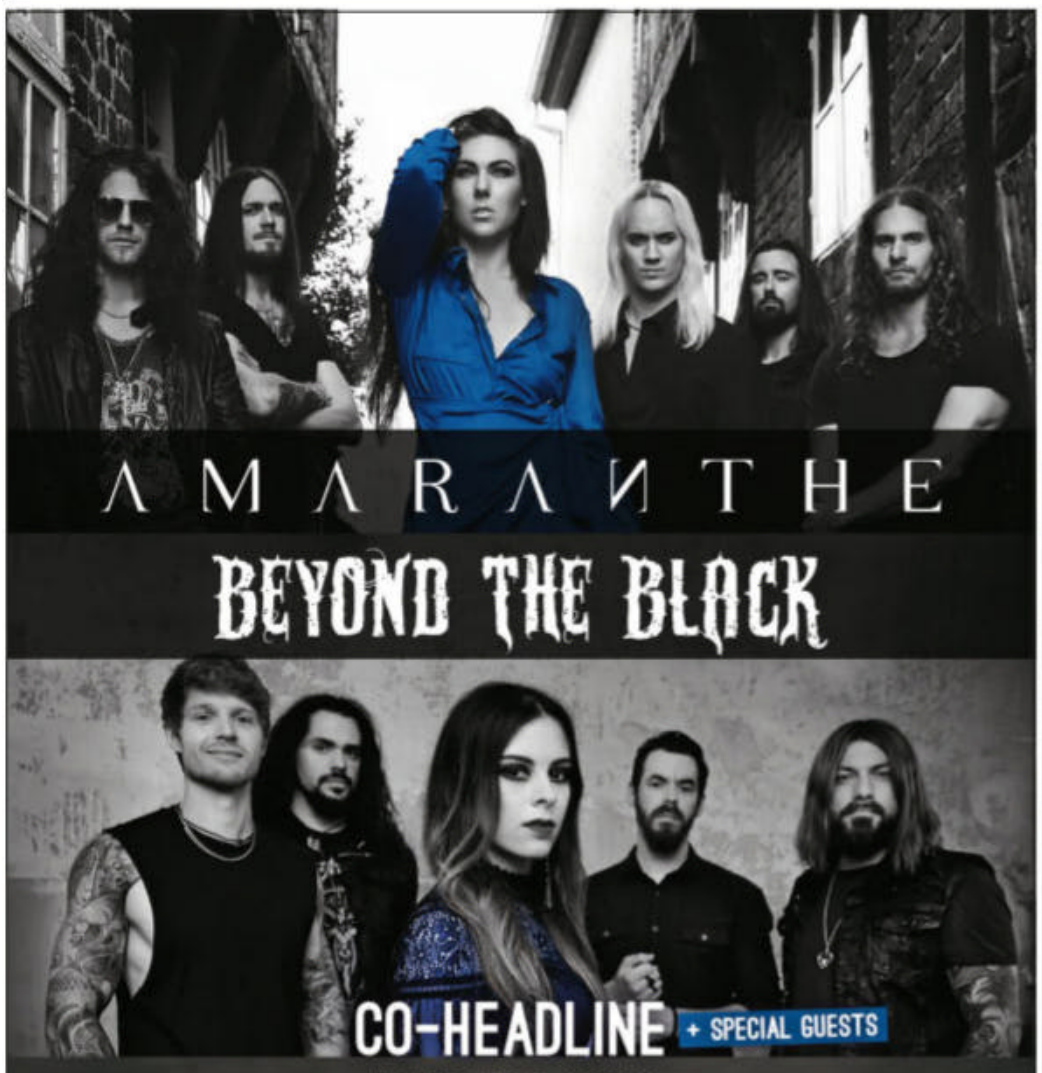

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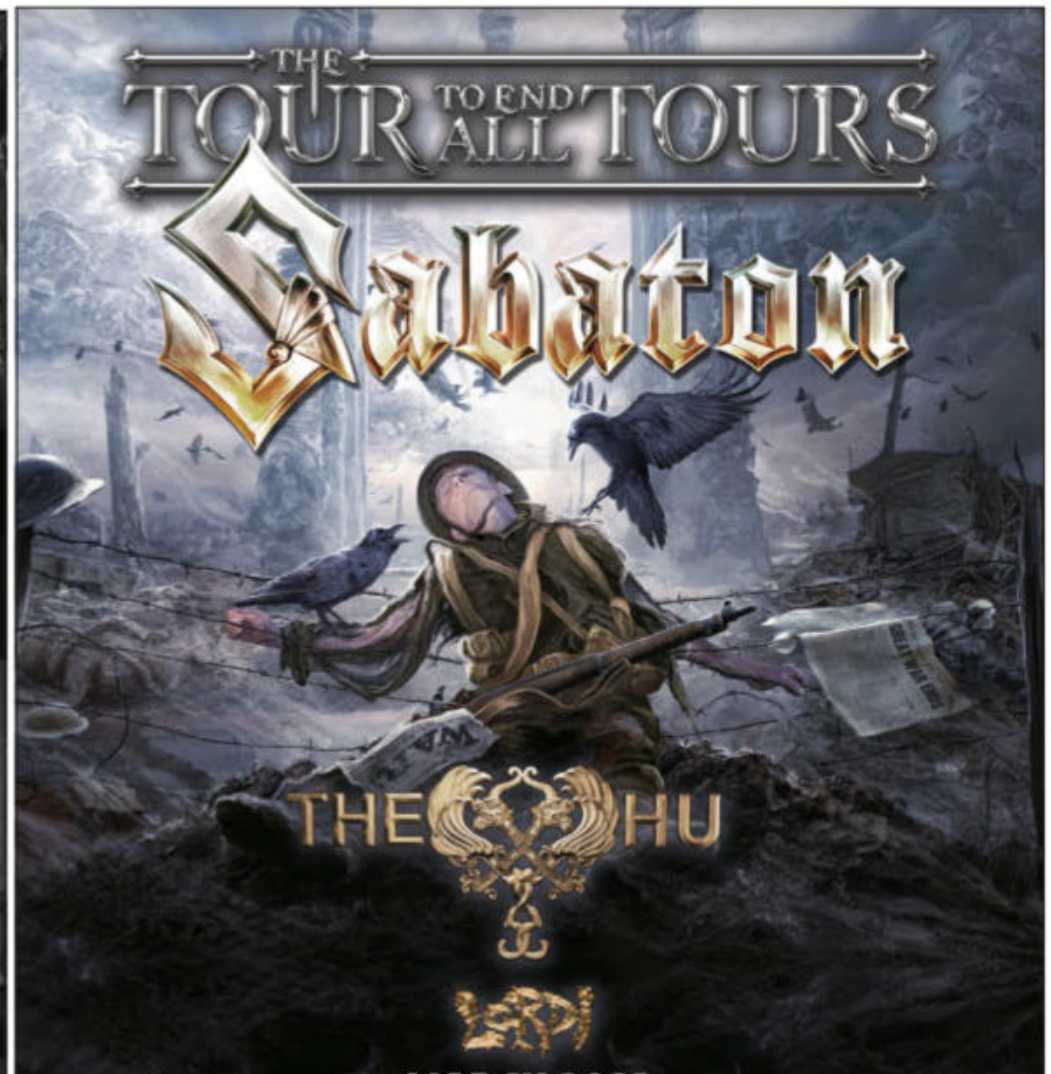

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YOUR SHOUT

JOEY BEING GONE FUCKING SUCKS

Joey Jordison: we all miss you, man

…was just one of a number of very fair points you lot made to us this month

#1 FOREVER

It's been weeks and I still can't believe we're never going to see Joey Jordison drum on a metal track again. It doesn't feel right. This fucking sucks and it isn't fair.
Molls Oaney (Facebook)

We couldn't agree more. It still feels shocking, surreal, and above all else, just plain sad. We hope this month's cover feature will at least go some way in giving Joey's amazing fans a bit of catharsis and some great memories of the great man.

FUTURE SOUNDS?

Am I the only one who's hoping there'll be some unreleased Joey Jordison material out there? Between 'Knot, Murderdolls, Scar The Martyr, Sinsaenum… Surely he can't have released everything?
Jack Foley (Facebook)

It does seem unlikely that there'd be nothing out there – most artists have a ton of unfinished ideas by the time they get to certain points in their careers. But will we ever get to hear it? That's not up to us.

IRON WILL

Loved Dom Lawson's Maiden feature in the last issue. It got me so hyped for the record, can it be September now please?
Matt Wheeler (Facebook)

Maiden: still the kings

Well, lucky for you Matt, it is! We hope you enjoy *Senjutsu* as much as our reviewer Joe Daly did last month. And cover writer Dom, to be fair. And Editor Merlin. And Reviews Edi– Oh, you get the picture.

MAI-BUM

Am I the only one not feeling the new Maiden direction? *TWOW* left me cold and Samurai Eddie…I don't know, it feels a bit meh to me.
Jamey Grove (Facebook)

Sorry, you've got an Eddie waving a big ol samurai blade around and you think it's boring?! What did you want, Baker Eddie? Painter Eddie? Children's TV Presenter Eddie? Wait, we've just had a brilliant idea for a new sitcom…

THE SYSTEM HAS SUCCEEDED

Loved seeing System Of A Down back on the cover of *Metal Hammer* the other month, it feels like it's been years. And what an album for it as well! *Toxicity* is my favourite rock album ever, if I'm being honest – I don't think they ever topped it.
George Abraham (email)

#TWEETS

Seriously, someone touches Saka again I'll kill em.
Rou Reynolds, Enter Shikari
(@RouReynolds)

I had the experimental 3rd vaccine. I don't feel any side effects.
M…e…o…w.
Geezer Butler, Black Sabbath
(@geezerbutler)

Someone just paid for our @StarbucksUK order at the drive-through because they wanted us to have a nice day. Kind people exist!
Larissa Stupar, Venom Prison
(@larissastupar)

WEST COAST GANGSTER ROCK. Remember where you heard it first. #webeenhere #punxofcolour #rockmusic isblackmusic
Jason Aalon Butler, Fever333
(@mrjasonaalon)

MAIDEN: JOHN MCMURTRIE LEAD: JESSE WILD/RHYTHM MAGAZINE/FUTURE

New album please, right now

We're really glad you dug it! It would definitely be lovely to do a System Of A Down cover for a whole new album but, as always, we're still not holding our breath for that one.

SHEER AUDACITY

Who the fuck cares if Ed Sheeran might make a death metal album?! He's a fucking pop poser. I don't want any of that shit near my scene. Might as well be Britney going grindcore.
Casey Smith (Facebook)

Man, some of you lot are testy this month! We're not convinced anyone needs to hear an Ed Sheehan death metal album right now, but fuck it, if he wants to give it a go, who are we to stop him? That doesn't mean we have to listen, obviously.

BEYOND BORDERS

I know Blink are a pop punk band but they were a massive band for me growing up and I was gutted to read about Mark Hoppus's cancer battle. Wishing him a speedy recovery from one metal (former pop punk) fan.
James Stoodley (email)

We couldn't agree more, James. All the best to Mark and the Blink camp.

DRAGON BALLS

Trivium are so fucking underrated. *Sin And The Sentence*? Classic. *What The Dead Men Say*? Classic. *In The Court Of The Dragon*? Looking like another classic is on the way. Why aren't this band in arenas everywhere?!
Jenny Crawford (Facebook)

We agree! Trivium have been their own worst enemies at points but they may just be the most on-form heavy metal band in the world right now. Turn to p.88 to read our review on their latest offering.

BLACKED OUT

Is anyone else already bored of all this *Black Album* shit? I don't need 50 versions of *Sad But True* sung by a bunch of indie artists. Just give me a new album, please.
Russ Simpson (Facebook)

Honestly? We've liked a lot of the stuff on *The Blacklist*. Anyone else get serious Ghost vibes from the Biffy cover of *Holier*? Anyone? Hello?

THE BIG DEBATE

In issue #349, black metal legend Satyr suggested that a lot of young metal fans aren't engaging with the spirit and history of the genre. Our readers had some thoughts.

HE SAID

"A lot of kids on the internet talk about black metal without knowing anything about it or where it comes from... I don't think they're familiar with early Mayhem. If they are, they haven't understood it."

YOU SAY

There's not really a lot of accessible information about black metal from mainstream media, so the kids don't get to know about it.
Bindi Louise (Facebook)

Discovering Watain was one of the greatest things to happen to me since I was a wide-eyed 12-year-old who had plugged in Slayer for the first time. Discovering them was important because not only did it expose me to all kinds of other great bands like Bathory, but I have also learned a great deal about their home country.
Jon Boger (Facebook)

I would take 100 black metal bands over one mumble rapper any day.
Michael Self (Facebook)

While I was guilty of doing this myself, so many people gatekeep the community instead of ushering in new participants. Music is for everyone, and everyone gets together for shows to enjoy HEAVY FUCKING METAL.
Benni Reiter (Facebook)

There's only one true Black Metal band, and they are not from Norway, but from Canada. Have you ever heard of Nickelback? My god (or Satan?), they are true!
Mattias Aronsson (Facebook)

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/METALHAMMERREADERS

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers

EMPLOYED TO SERVE
Conquering
"What better tribute to Joey than to see a band inspired by Slipknot so perfectly defining metal in 2021?"
MERLIN ALDERSLADE
EDITOR

SPIRITBOX
Eternal Blue
"An intoxicating debut from Canada's fast-rising stars"
ELEANOR GOODMAN
DEPUTY EDITOR

UNTO OTHERS
Strength
"The best leather glove-clad anthems since Beastmilk's debut"
JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

SLIPKNOT
Slipknot
"Timeless brutality. You left one helluva legacy, Joey"
VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR

IRON MAIDEN
Senjutsu
"Cinematic and expansive. It's great to have a new Maiden to spin"
LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

KING WOMAN
Celestial Blues
"Gorgeous yet savage – a strong contender for my Album Of The Year"
HANNAH MAY KILROY
FREELANCE NEWS EDITOR

PRESS/HERRING & HERRING

NEW NOISE

KING WOMAN

Graceful, brutal, triumphant and devastating – King Woman's *Celestial Blues* draws on an intense Christian upbringing and a determination to shun mediocrity

WORDS: ALEX DELLER

NO LIE: KING Woman's second album is one of the most jaw-dropping releases you'll hear this year. Graceful, brutal, triumphant and devastating all at once, *Celestial Blues* raises the game for one of modern metal's most unique entities. The band is led by the hyper-prolific and hyper-talented Kris Esfandiari, a chameleonic force of nature whose exciting, enigmatic work spans multiple genres and projects. Like previous King Woman releases, *Celestial Blues* draws on an intense and oppressive upbringing in a Charismatic Christian household, where exorcisms and possessions were par for the course. Kris broke from all this in her mid-20s, after an experience that was both harrowing and epiphanic.

"I did psychedelics for the first time right before I started King Woman," she says. "I locked myself in a bathroom on Halloween, I was on mushrooms and holly or something like that, and I heard my own inner voice for the first time. It just told me the truth about everything I couldn't see before. My world kind of crumbled, I was horrified. And I had an identity crisis – a psychotic break, basically. It was like my whole life was just a lie up until that moment. I was like, 'Oh, this is why nothing ever felt right.'"

Since then, King Woman's work has seen Kris by turns furious and searching for answers. *Celestial Blues*, however, finds her in a more thoughtful, meditative place – one where she's been able to wrest control from the angels and demons that haunted her for so long.

"I'm going through this tunnel and eventually I'll get out to the other side but I'm not quite there yet," says Kris, though she is the first to admit she didn't necessarily have a destination in mind when she started this latest phase of her journey. "I don't think I realised what I was doing when I was writing the album. It's like I became an actor, so much so that I could embody these [biblical] archetypes and make them whatever I wanted them to be – to turn them into these playful characters while having full control."

While the album is rife with metaphorical devils and Christs that Kris is able to deftly puppeteer, questions of agency and control also loomed over the album's physical creation. "I had to deal with a lot of fuckery making this record," she sighs. "I realised how lazy other people can be, and how comfortable some people are being completely mediocre. I'm not. I was like, 'I don't care if people call me a bitch, or a diva, or an asshole, I'm gonna make this record how I want it to be. I'm going to take control of the creative direction, even if people think it's weird.' I just told pretty much everyone to fuck off, and took complete creative control."

There's no bitterness or rancor in this retelling, just the matter-of-fact decisiveness of someone who cares deeply about their art and the direction it takes. While it's perhaps inevitable that someone who's worked hard to free themselves from one set of controlling circumstances should also seek to escape another, Kris says carving one's individual path in the music business presents its own specific challenges.

"I didn't exactly know how to sing, I didn't know what I was doing," she admits of her first forays into the industry. "I was still developing my ability to produce, to be a songwriter and learning how to lead a band. And learning how to say 'no', how to be OK with telling people what I wanted when I knew I was right. I'm a lot less naïve than I used to be."

Asked whether she encountered any push-back when she began to assert herself and speak her mind, Kris's response is wry but unequivocal: "I'm a queer Iranian woman, raised by immigrants, and I'm in the metal scene," she says. "People are constantly trying to put me down or get in my way. I'm a totally kind, polite person. I'm pretty reasonable. Even so, I've still encountered tons of assholes that try to tell me I'm not good enough. I don't listen to them – every time someone says that to me, I prove them wrong."

This defiant, can-do attitude extends beyond King Woman and includes a multitude of projects that span shoegaze (*Miserable*), hip hop (*Dalmatian*) and a plethora of other genres, as well as external writing and production gigs. "I was deprived of cool music growing up," explains Kris of her overwhelming appetite to hear and create new music. "I wasn't allowed to listen to anything if it wasn't Christian music, so when I was introduced to music outside of that it was like, 'Give me all of it!'"

Given a church that encouraged people to burn their secular music and her wholesale break from Charismatic Christianity, it seems fair to ask whether her chosen path – not to mention its challenging, outré nature – has put Kris at odds with her family. Thankfully, this is not quite the case.

"My parents think I'm possessed, but we're cool," she says. "There was a point where I confronted them and I didn't talk to them for a while. We've had many breakdowns, I've had to create some serious boundaries and I've been undergoing intensive therapy for a while now. I think it's healed all of us, and taught all of us lessons – that I'm allowed to be who I am, and they're allowed to be who they are."

***CELESTIAL BLUES* IS OUT NOW VIA RELAPSE**

PRESS

King Woman rules

“IT WAS LIKE MY WHOLE LIFE WAS A LIE UP UNTIL THAT MOMENT”

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
A smouldering, mesmerising blend of doom, shoegaze and outlier post-metal

FOR FANS OF:
Oxbow, True Widow, Neurosis

LISTEN TO:
Boghz

NEW NOISE

BLANKET

Post-metallers' second release explores the trappings of social media

WORDS: MATT MILLS

AS THE UK entered lockdown in 2020, Blanket were demoing 15 songs for their second album. By the following autumn, they'd scrapped every single one of them.

"It sounded like three different EPs," guitarist Simon Morgan remembers of the material his band had hoped would follow debut album *How To Let Go*. "It wasn't a coherent body of work; it was three different sides of Blanket."

One year after pushing the reset button, Blanket's second full-length, *Modern Escapism*, is finally here. Unlike the fractured sounds cast to the wayside, its identity is clear as crystal, juxtaposing what brought them to the dance. While *How To Let Go* shimmered with optimism and post-rock sweetness, its successor is a sludgier beast, contrasting dainty vocals against plodding metal rhythms.

"We saw the light and we didn't like it," laughs Simon. He attributes the swelling heaviness to new drummer Aiden Baldwin, a devout metalhead, as well as the gloom endured worldwide over the past 18 months.

"The experience of being in 'unprecedented' times certainly had an influence," he continues. "It was influenced by that feeling of being locked in and watching; what else was there to do?"

Modern Escapism's title alludes to social media: the only way we've been able to connect with each other while trapped indoors. "I'm aware of its impact on mental health through my daughter," says Aiden. "When we were at school, we could leave any social troubles there; they're so connected now that they come home and still see and hear the same stuff."

"It's information you don't need or want but it's always there," concludes Simon. "Social media is necessary for bands to promote themselves, but it's a toxic place." So switch off your screen and open your ears to an hour of sumptuous post-metal instead, OK?

IN SHORT:

SOUNDS LIKE:
Dreamy shoegaze melodies floating atop a foundation of monolithic post-metal

FOR FANS OF:
Bossk, Holy Fawn, Deftones

CHECK OUT:
White noise

***MODERN ESCAPISM* IS OUT NOW VIA MUSIC FOR NATIONS**

DRAGGED UNDER

Nineties skatepunk meets modern metalcore via Seattle

WORDS: PARIS FAWCETT • PICTURE: SARA LINDSEY

WHAT DO YOU get when you cross the choruses of Beartooth, the bouncy hardcore of The Bronx, the emotion of The Used and the attitude of Millencolin? You get Dragged Under, the Seattle-based quintet who sound like someone went back in time to introduce modern metalcore to the 90s. "We're cool with providing a 30-minute nostalgic experience of what it was like growing up in the 90s," says vocalist Tony Cappocchi. "Basically we're *Tony Hawk Pro Skater 1*-core."

The band were formed from the ashes of Tony's previous outfit, Rest, Repose, who featured popular Youtube musician Jared Dines on bass – but Dragged Under couldn't sound further from this thinking-man's alt-rock collective. "You listen to Rest, Repose and it's very milquetoast, rounded edges and whimsical," explains Tony, "I'm not interested in dancing on the nuance of words. I wanna get in people's faces and tell them exactly what I want them to hear."

Passionate livewire messaging is all over Dragged Under's 2020 debut album, *The World Is In Your Way*, and on their new live EP, *We'll Do It Live*, which contains the kind of zealous songs that punks crave. "I think kids that are into this new wave of punk – the rappers making punk songs and the Olivia Rodrigos of the world – our music has a place there," says Tony. "And for the mid-20-30 year olds that used to love skatepunk, I think that we'd be a breath of fresh air for them too."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
The entire 1999 Warped Tour line-up smashed together

FOR FANS OF:
Beartooth, A Day To Remember, Polaris

LISTEN TO:
Hypochondria

***WE'LL DO IT LIVE* IS OUT NOW VIA MASCOT**

PRESS

ETERNAL STRUGGLE

This Tel Aviv crew bring classic hardcore with a contemporary twist

WORDS: KEZ WHELAN • PICTURE: AVIHAI LEVY

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Incendiary hardcore grooves with a modern twist

FOR FANS OF:
Madball, Terror, Sick Of It All

LISTEN TO:
Point One

"THE LOCAL SCENE is intimate, intense and extremely active," says Eternal Struggle vocalist Ori Frank of his home city, Tel Aviv. "There is no shortage of challenge, but I think that's what drives them to be better bands."

Those challenges have evidently energised Eternal Struggle, with their fusion of classic New York–style hardcore with a more contemporary sound, catching the attention of ex–Madball guitarist Brian 'Mitts' Daniels, who produced their debut album, *Year Of The Gun*.

"Mitts had so much valuable insight, knowledge and wisdom, ideas, and his drive and focus really made us raise the bar and brought out the best in us and took our band to a new level," says Ori.

Alongside traditional hardcore themes of unity, there's a gritty authenticity to the band's depiction of conflict.

"We are all drafted into the military here so themes such as PTSD, accountability, misconceptions and manipulation are all present within all our songs" Ori explains. "Music has never changed anything in politics, but it has inspired and empowered many individuals to think differently and to fight the good fight. It's created dialogue, spread awareness and proven the power of unity and positivity. It has helped many cope with the endless challenges and frustrations we deal with in society. It gives a voice to many silent victims and to the kids who are sick of their toxic surroundings. It may not be political change but it brings change in human interaction, behaviour and relationships that can transform cultural, traditional, social and religious institutions over time."

***YEAR OF THE GUN* IS OUT NOW VIA DEMONS RUN AMOK**

VENUES

Mammoth modern metal with a new singer courtesy of... Steel Panther?!

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS • PICTURE: JOSEF KRISTOF

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Super-catchy metalcore with arena-sized ambition

FOR FANS OF:
Annisokay, Our Hollow, Our Home, Polaris

LISTEN TO:
Shifting Colours

VENUES FOUND THEIR singer, Lela Gruber, in the most unexpected of circumstances. "I wanted to start a Youtube channel where I met bands before their shows," says the vocalist, recalling the time she had a backstage singalong with Steel Panther's Michael Starr in Stuttgart in 2019. "Later, he recognised me in the crowd and told me to come up onstage. We performed *Community Property*." Venues' guitarist, Constantin Ranis, was in the crowd and recorded Lela's singing on his phone. He invited her to join Venues when their original singer quit. The rest is history.

It's a fitting start given Venues' atmospheric metalcore was made to fill large spaces. During the pandemic, working with producer Christoph Wieczorek (Annisokay), they recorded their new album, *Solace*, which sees them take a heavier approach than on their 2018 debut, *Aspire*, melding old-school metal and post-hardcore influences into their anthemic blend.

"If I didn't have the opportunity to write the album, I would have just sat waiting for better times," says Lela. "The band and the album gave us solace. It was a light at the end of the tunnel for each of us."

***SOLACE* IS OUT NOW VIA ARISING EMPIRE**

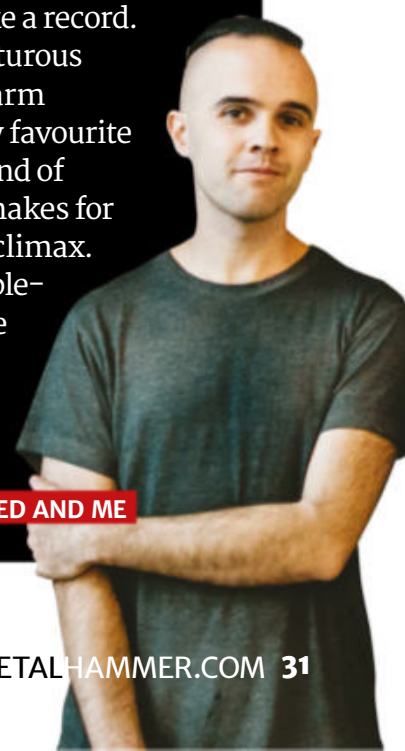
IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to

HÄLLAS

"HÄLLAS WERE MY favourite discovery of 2020 when their second LP, *Conundrum*, came out. It's like if 70s Yes had time travelled to the 80s and brought 80s Yes's gear back with them to make a record. Amazingly adventurous arrangements, warm recording, and my favourite singalong at the end of *Fading Hero* that makes for a truly cinematic climax. Tune up your double-neck 12 string, fire up the Mellotron and blast off!"

DAN BRIGGS
BETWEEN THE BURIED AND ME



ITK: GEORGE ANDREWS. HÄLLAS: PRESS/ K.BENGTSSON.

HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month

JUDAS PRIEST

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HOW MUCH METAL can one human being convincingly consume in one sitting? It's time to do the research, because this Priest box set is fucking enormous. With no fewer than 42 discs and the kind of lavish packaging that makes record collectors spontaneously burst into tears, it's an unparalleled celebration of one of the greatest bands of all time. All of Priest's studio albums are included, but it's the three previously unheard 24-track live recordings that will have the diehards salivating. Your bank account may already be sweating at the thought of the set's rather challenging price tag, but with exclusive signed photos, a Judas Priest razor blade (which is blunt, needless to say), a Priest book, a tour programme and posters all thrown in, this is definitive, comprehensive and beautifully conceived. Just don't drop it on the cat.

tinyurl.com/priest-box

TREMONTI BOX SET

£29.50

If you're still waiting with arms wide open for a Creed reunion, Stapp it. Mark Tremonti's brought the riffs for ages in Alter Bridge, and his new solo record's set to continue that trend. Dig in.

tinyurl.com/tremonti-box

MARSHALL BEER

£1.85

Turn your hangover up to 11 with this tasty Marshall-branded bevvy – a cheeky triple blonde bitter that weighs in at an impressive 8.6%. Are there some Fender-approved headache pills we can buy for the next day?

tinyurl.com/marshall-treble

SABBATH *TECHNICAL ECSTASY* BOX SET

£135

This mahoosive offering sees the Sabs' seventh album remixed and splashed across five LPs, with outtakes and live tracks galore. Sealing the deal are extensive liner notes, and, of course, that famous 'horny robots' cover art.

tinyurl.com/ecstasy-box

IVAN MOODY POETRY BOOK BUNDLE

£26-£74

'Coca-Cola Pepsi, Playboy text me' isn't exactly Byron, but that's not stopping Ivan Moody. Five Finger Death Punch's vocalist is leaping from the stage onto the page, accompanied by some brilliant Blake Armstrong watercolours.

tinyurl.com/moody-poet

R2-D2 LAMPSHADE

£28.30

Nothing says 'Nerd, but with taste' quite like R2-D2's disembodied head refashioned as a Tiffany-style lampshade. It contains around 535 pieces of hand-ground glass, which is probably 535 more than your current lamp has.

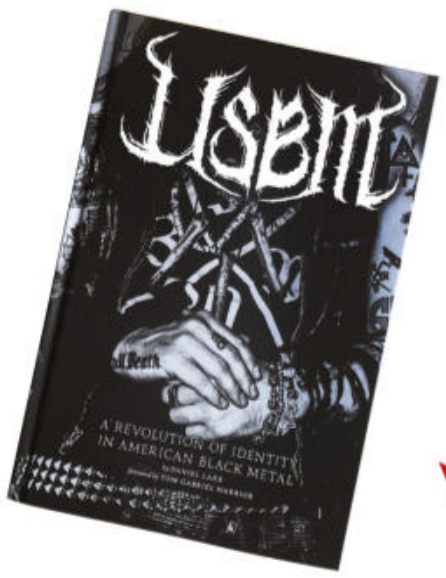
tinyurl.com/r2d2-shade

EMPLOYED TO SERVE T-SHIRT

£19.99

Employed To Serve's new record, *Conquering*, sees the band become the second-most-metal thing in Woking, after that *War Of The Worlds* tripod statue. Give *Conquering* a listen, wear this and get your head mashed.

tinyurl.com/etee-serve

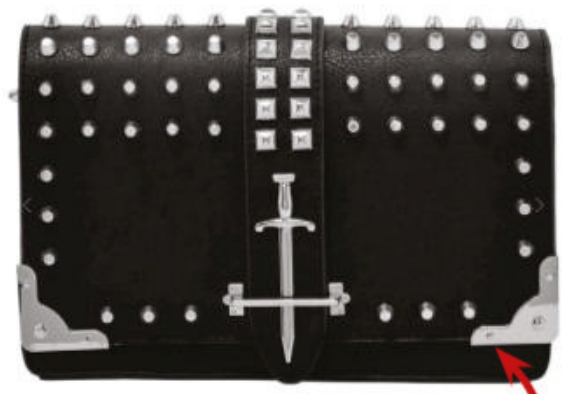


USBM BOOK

£28

Daniel Lake's epic exploration of USBM is now available this side of the pond. Limited to 1,000 copies, this 544-page, photo-packed whopper explores the scene's music, personalities and ideologies – good, bad and ugly.

tinyurl.com/usbm-bible



ZEVA SHOULDER BAG

£39.99

Killstar's rockin' faux leather shoulder bag comes loaded with studs, spikes and some sort of ceremonial dagger. You'll look like a chic warrior queen, but be warned that airport security *will* hate you.

tinyurl.com/zeva-bag

KATAKLYSM COFFEE

£14.50

Not having a good drop of coffee in the morning is enough to send anyone plummeting into the arms of devastation, so cheers to these Canadian metalheads for sharing their signature blend with us!

tinyurl.com/koffee-klysm

SLEEP TOKEN BUNDLE

£55

Mysterious metallers Sleep Token don't make things easy for us – not only are we still trying to figure out who the hell they are, but now we have to choose between two sweet shirts and three different vinyl variants.

tinyurl.com/stoken-bundle

SIGNS OF THE SWARM TAROT CARDS

£11

These Absolvere-branded tarot cards foretell a mysterious stranger entering your life. That would be a bailiff – silly you for maxing out your credit card on merch from this Pittsburgh deathcore crew.

tinyurl.com/swarm-tarot

JUDAS PRIEST CANDLE

£33

If Deafheaven do blankets and Rammstein do dildos, the metal gods are allowed a candle. Peppered with woody notes, the vegan-friendly coconut blend is accompanied by a motel-style keyring. Sure Mr Halford would approve.

tinyurl.com/priest-candle

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FOREVER #1

On July 27, 2021, music was rocked by the unthinkable: Joey Jordison, founding member of Slipknot, heavy metal icon, had died at just 46 years old. *Hammer* writer Paul Brannigan – the first UK journalist to ever meet Joey – pays tribute to a legend, helped by some of those who knew him best

WORDS: PAUL BRANNIGAN

GETTY/STEVE BRIGHT. ADDITIONAL REPORTING: STEPHEN HILL

JOEY JORDISON

Joey Jordison liked to tell people that his very first memory found him alone, locked up, in darkness.

"I don't know if I had conscious thoughts while I was in the womb, but I was in a black cell," he recalled. "Looking up in the corner, I could see a tiny square window, letting in a little bit of light. That was it."

The story fed neatly into the narrative constructed around Slipknot in the dying days of the 20th century. Here was America's worst nightmare: a collective of alienated, isolated, frustrated sociopaths emerging from society's shadowy margins on a mission to destroy everything pure and sacred, to create and embrace chaos, to unleash hell on earth.

They wore masks to protect their anonymity, dressed identically in barcoded red coveralls to remove all trace of ego and individual personality, and self-identified by numbers rather than names to eradicate personal histories and unshackle themselves from any inhibiting loyalty to family, community, church or state. Terrifyingly, these faceless freaks could be anyone, and now they were among us, inside us.

"*Fuck it all, fuck this world, fuck everything that you stand for*", sang '#8' on *Surfacing*, the signature liberation anthem on their self-titled Roadrunner Records debut. "*Don't belong, don't exist, don't give a shit! Don't ever judge me.*"

On May 27, 1999 this writer became the first UK music journalist to see Slipknot face-to-mask, on the opening date of that summer's Ozzfest tour, in West Palm Beach, Florida. Their mid-afternoon set on the festival's second stage was exhilarating and terrifying in equal measure, a violent, cathartic explosion of hate, venom and rage that left the audience awed and electrified. Instinctively aware that here was a band like no other, myself and veteran rock photographer Ross Halfin cautiously approached The Nine as they walked offstage. Never easily impressed, Ross demanded to know where the group hailed from. Hearing the response, "Des Moines, Iowa," the well-travelled photographer sneered, "That place is a shithole."

"We know," came the instant reply from within the huddle. "That's why we formed this band."

"You stick nine guys together who have had no outlet for their whole lives, and you live in Iowa and you come out on a fucking stage, then you have some shit to portray. We were walking around like ghosts, slitting our wrists open saying, 'Please take a look at this, look at what we are trying to do.'"

With these words, Slipknot member '#1', AKA Nathan Jonas 'Joey' Jordison, introduced himself to the readers of *Metal Hammer* in the spring of 1999. Speaking to this writer more than a decade later, the drummer's memories of seeing his band in the magazine for the first time were still vivid, and he shared them in excitable, high-pitched, rapid-fire bursts.

"It was an introductory two-page feature with a picture of us down on Santa Monica Pier: we had our red coveralls on, the sky was blue and you could see the Ferris wheel behind us," he recalled with perfect clarity. "I remember getting the magazine around May 25 as we were leaving Des Moines to go down to Florida for our first show on the Ozzfest, and I was like, 'Let me see it! Let me see it!' I remember passing it around the bus, thinking, 'We're in *Metal Hammer*, we're on a tour bus, and we're going to play fucking Ozzfest!' It was like it just couldn't get any better than that. It was just one of those moments, a really great memory. I was thinking, 'Holy shit, we have arrived!'"

"ALL JOEY WANTED TO TALK ABOUT WAS METAL"
MONTE CONNER, EX-ROADRUNNER A&R HEAD

In truth, for the then-24-year-old drummer, Slipknot's journey into the darkness had only just begun.

By the summer of 2003, when *Metal Hammer* writer Dave Everley sat down with the drummer to harvest his personal reflections and recollections of that journey, Joey Jordison was one of the most recognisable rock stars in the world, whether masked or unmasked – the drummer having set aside his trademark blank 'spooky Kabuki' mask when launching his horror-punk side band Murderdolls with Frankenstein Drag Queens From Planet 13 frontman Wednesday 13 the previous year, during Slipknot's first real time-out since their ferocious, feral 1999 breakthrough album.

Such was Slipknot's impact in those four pivotal years, a period in which they comprehensively redefined the shape and sound of modern metal, that it's possible to forget just how far outside the margins they once proudly stood. To a large extent, in fact, it was Shawn 'Clown' Crahan's almost maniacal commitment to making uncompromising outsider art that first attracted Joey Jordison to join the band, then still operating as The Pale Ones, in the summer of 1995: "I knew we were going to fuck people up," he would later recall.

From day one, the drummer began augmenting and amplifying Shawn's vision. It was Joey who created the band's logo, who took a pivotal role in designing their visual aesthetic, who coined the affectionate term 'Maggots' for their swelling, fiercely loyal and increasingly unhinged fanbase. Each night, Shawn would join his livewire sidekick at the petrol station where Joey worked, and the pair would talk 'til daybreak, plotting out the roadmap which they hoped would facilitate their escape from Des Moines and lead on to inevitable world domination.

By the time Roadrunner Records A&R chief Monte Conner became sufficiently intrigued by the word-of-mouth buzz on the still-coalescing project, Slipknot effectively had three frontmen in their ranks: the newly recruited, and seriously twisted pretty boy singer Corey Taylor; conceptual visionary Shawn Crahan; and tireless hype man Joey Jordison. Of the three, however, it was the effervescent Joey – by now known to his bandmates by the nickname 'Superball' due to his relentless energy – who made the biggest first impression on the industry vet when, in April 1998, Monte first saw Slipknot live, at a showcase gig the band's manager at the time had set up at the McCormick Auditorium on the campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago.

"Joey pulled me aside as soon as I got backstage," Monte tells *Hammer*. "All he wanted to talk about was metal. Not business but just metal. Joey's encyclopaedic knowledge of underground metal as well as the history of Roadrunner Records just blew me away. This was a person who spoke my language, and we could have stood there and talked for hours. He had a manic energy and excitement in his eyes that convinced me that he had the passion, belief and commitment to make Slipknot a groundbreaking force. His long-term vision was that he wanted Slipknot to be the biggest metal band on the planet."

"Slipknot is not just music, it's a force, it's a lifestyle," the evangelistic Joey insisted, demanding unwavering loyalty to the cause as the legions of Maggots swelled.

"It didn't happen overnight, because we had to work so hard for it but… it happened overnight! We went on Ozzfest, and three weeks into it we'd

JOEY JORDISON

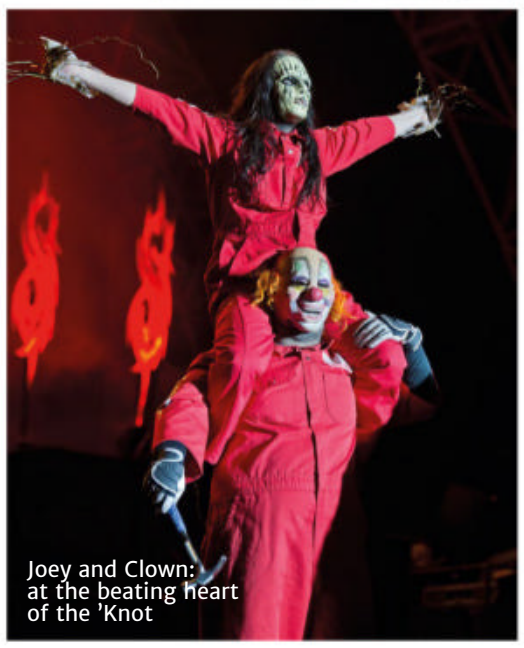
The music industry and fans are still reeling from the loss of #1

GETTY

sold 150,000 records. Every time we played, everybody – every fucking band, Black Sabbath included – was out there watching us. And we're out for blood, we fucking hate everybody, just 'Fuck you!' That's always been the Slipknot mentality. We love a lot of other bands, we love a lot of different music, but when it comes to us playing, we just don't care. It's your ass. People think it's arrogant, and it is. We believe in our craft. We believe in Slipknot."

"I remember Bruce Dickinson saying, 'I don't wake up and say, I'm the singer in Iron Maiden'," he added. "Well, I do wake up and fucking say, 'I'm the drummer in Slipknot.'"

Slipknot circa 2005: The Nine took our world by storm



Joey and Clown: at the beating heart of the 'Knot

Joey Jordison originally chose his trademark look as a throwback tribute to a memorable Halloween night in the mid 80s when his mother Jackie lunged at him wearing an identical white mask, and "scared the fucking shit" out of her eldest child. The prank was an illustration of the tight relationship between Joey and his mother, who initiated her boy's lifelong love of music by sitting him in front of the family stereo rather than TV set whenever she had to attend to his two younger sisters. "I latched onto music at a young age and it was all I cared about," Joey later remembered. "I was a day-dreamer, thinking about these larger than-than-life possibilities that could happen if I worked hard." When Joey wasn't found singing along to his parents' vinyl collections, Jackie Jordison would inevitably locate her livewire toddler in the kitchen, gleefully thumping pots and pans with wooden spoons: "I thought he had a heck of a beat for a little, tiny kid," she later recalled. One day, when Joey was eight, he returned from school to find his parents sitting at the kitchen table. "Go downstairs and get my Elton John record," his mum told him. "We're having an argument about one of the songs." The boy trudged down to the basement and found a drum kit set up in the middle of the room. Stunned by the discovery, it took him a minute or two to compose himself and locate the album his mum had asked for. When he handed it over, his mum laughed and said, "Joey, I didn't need the record. Go!" The words had barely left her lips before she heard cymbals crashing and thumping beats.

"From that point on," Joey said, referring to the moment as an 'epiphany,' "my life changed."

But not in every way. Two decades on, when Dave Everley caught up with the drummer, Joey was still living at home with his mom in the same house.

"I like the quiet," he said, a comment that carried a certain irony. "I like getting away from the busy streets and the noise and the chaos. It's nice to go home to some peace and quiet, 'cos there's none of that on the road."

Asked by Dave to name his greatest obsession, Joey replied, "music". Asked how he switched off from music, the drummer looked puzzled.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"Do you ever stop thinking about music?" Dave enquired.

Again, Joey looked confused.

"No," he answered, as if this was the weirdest question he'd ever faced in his life. "It's the only thing I know how to do well. I can spin upside down on a drum riser in front of 20,000 people with Slipknot, but I can't go to the mailbox and figure out my mail. I have no sense of normal reality at all."

In truth, real life lost its appeal for the drummer around the time that his father walked out of the Jordison family home in Waukee, Iowa: "All of a sudden," he recalls, "I had to be the man of the house, in a weird way. It turned me into a more mature person at a really young age."

Kiss, Iron Maiden and Black Sabbath offered Joey escapism from the daily grind, while Keith Moon, John Bonham and Peter Criss became the boy's substitute male role models. Later, Metallica's Lars Ulrich and Slayer's Dave Lombardo would provide both challenges and inspiration.

"Without Metallica I wouldn't be doing what I am doing," Joey once acknowledged. "Zeppelin and The Who passed the torch to Metallica, they're that band for our generation. I have every Metallica record of course, and I would spend hours on drums in my parents' basement, with the stereo behind me, cranking those records and learning Lars's drum beats, beat by beat. Nowadays, for me, Metallica can do whatever the fuck they want."

Wednesday 13 tells a brilliant story that paints a wonderful picture of his Murderdolls bandmate as a wide-eyed Metallica fanboy. The date was June 1, 2003, and having played the opening day of the inaugural Download festival at Donington Park, Murderdolls decided to stick around for day two, partly because they'd heard whispers that Metallica were set to make an unbilled mid-afternoon appearance on the site's second stage. Wednesday 13 uses the word "crazy" when recalling the day, remembering his band "running round drinking, partying and getting kinda loose." All fun and games until the singer lost his pals, and realised he had no idea where the Murderdolls bus was parked up.

"This is before the days of cell phones, so I was in real trouble," he tells *Hammer*. "I'm walking around and suddenly I see this bus pull up next to me…"

GETTY.

With Murderdolls, Joey could show a lighter side

The bus door swings open, and to Wednesday's astonishment, out steps Kirk Hammett, Lars Ulrich and Robert Trujillo, fresh from his UK debut with Metallica.

"They go, 'Hey! You played with Joey, right?' And I go, 'Yeah!' And they go, 'Where is he?' And I tell them I don't know, that I've lost my bus. And Lars says, 'Come on, hop in and we'll go find him!' So, I'm sitting there… on Metallica's bus! They start driving around and eventually find the Murderdolls bus.

"I go up on to the top deck and the band are all sitting there glaring at me. Joey's sitting there in the back lounge and he looks at me and shouts, 'Dude! Where the fuck have you been! We're gonna be late for our show tomorrow!' And I'm just smiling at him, and I go, 'Well… I mean… I brought Metallica…' Suddenly Lars and all the other guys come running up the stairs and Joey's like, 'WHAAA WHAAA WHAAA?!' They're all like, 'Chill out, Joey!', laughing at him and he just couldn't believe it. His face, I wish you could have seen it! So, I was the guy that delivered Metallica to Joey. That was the kind of shit that happened to us during that time."

Famously, 12 months later, Metallica would once again come looking for Joey at Donington Park. This time, they needed a favour, as for the very first time on a show day, Lars was AWOL, his whereabouts unknown. They needed a stand-in drummer (two, actually, as Dave Lombardo had already offered to fill in for a couple of songs), if Joey fancied the gig?

"EVERY FUCKING BAND – SABBATH INCLUDED – WAS OUT THERE WATCHING US"

JOEY JORDISON

"My manager told me that James wanted to talk to me," Joey recalled, "and I went over there, and he asked me, and it was literally like a dream. I sat down in their little warm-up room, and we played some songs that we didn't get to play onstage and just jammed. I mean, the show was cool, but that was fucking *waaaaay* cooler, because it was just us. Getting to play with Metallica? Come on, it was amazing, man. It's one of my most treasured memories."

Suddenly, Joey seemed to be everywhere at once, joining the likes of Ministry and Korn for tours, and helping oversee Roadrunner Records' 25th anniversary Roadrunner United project, alongside Machine Head's Robb Flynn, Trivium's Matt Heafy and Fear Factory guitarist Dino Cazares. The future of metal seemed golden in his hands.

The laws of gravity state that what goes up, must come down. In retrospect, it's astonishing that the 'classic' Slipknot line-up held together for as long as they did. Unbeknown to anyone outside The Nine, by 2000, Slipknot were talking among themselves about the possibility of breaking up, in what Corey Taylor told this writer would have been "the most punk rock move of all time".

"I distinctly remember sitting outside of a hotel room on the [U.S.] East Coast with Clown and Joey specifically talking about the fact that we should just tour the album and then break up," Corey laughed. "To this day I wonder if we made the right choice by continuing. I sometimes think how wonderful that would have been."

In reality, things would splinter in the wake of the group's first US No.1 album, 2008's impressively bleak *All Hope Is Gone*. And this at a time when, having reassembled and parked their various side-projects, the group seemed at their most unified. "With nine guys it's very intense," Joey admitted to *Hammer* at the time. "[But] all nine original guys are still here. What other band can say that?"

"We are The Nine," said Shawn Crahan. "There is no one else. If I left ▶

GETTY.

Vimic: one of Joey's post-Slipknot bands. He certainly wasn't going to disappear quietly

this band, we'd be done. If Joey Jordison left this band, we'd be done."

On May 24, 2010, Slipknot bassist Paul Gray died following an accidental overdose of prescription drugs. The group rallied, and undertook an emotional memorial tour across 2011 and 2012 to honour the bassist. Towards the end of the run, Joey fell ill, having to be carried onstage on more than one occasion. "It scared the living shit out of me," he later told *Hammer*. "I didn't know what it was. You can be sick and still play, but this was something I'd never felt in my life before."

When he arrived home from the tour, Joey could barely walk. Medical examinations brought alarming news: Joey had been afflicted by transverse myelitis, a rare neurological condition affecting the spinal cord.

"It's like having your legs cut off, basically," the drummer revealed.

"At that moment," he later told *Hammer* scribe Dom Lawson in an emotional, raw interview, "my whole life was screwed."

On December 12, 2013, to the shock of the global metal community, Slipknot announced they were parting company with Joey. The drummer was informed of his friends' decision by email. Three years on, in conversation with Dom Lawson, his anger and disappointment was still painfully obvious.

"No band meeting? None. Anything from management? No, nothing. All I got was a stupid fucking email saying that I was out of the band that I busted my ass my whole life to fucking create, you know?

"I've been through so many things with those guys and I love them very much," he insisted. "What's hurtful is that the way it [being fired] went down was not fucking right. I didn't deserve that shit."

Joey Jordison was never going to disappear quietly into the night. In 2013 he re-emerged with a new band, Scar The Martyr. When that band ran its course, he bounced back with Vimic. And in 2016 he revealed his most significant post-Slipknot band, extreme metal supergroup Sinsaenum, featuring Attila Csihar of Mayhem and Dragonforce bassist Frédéric Leclercq on guitar. In mid-June 2016, on an emotional night in London, he was honoured with a *Metal Hammer* Golden God award in recognition both of his services to metal and his tenacity and spirit in refusing to let his illness dictate his life.

"This award is the perseverance of the soul," he said on the night, visibly moved. "This one of the most emotional and heartfelt awards I've ever received, because it's for real. This means more to me than pretty much any award I've gotten. I couldn't be happier and I'm very proud."

Though Joey maintained a fairly low profile in recent years, his absence from the scene caused no immediate concern. Indeed, Sinsaenum were known to be working on a third album, and the drummer was in contact with Wednesday 13 exchanging ideas for new Murderdolls songs, when, on July 27, the shocking news broke that Joey had died in his sleep the previous day. He was just 46 years old. As tributes poured in from grieving peers and fans alike, the members of Slipknot posted solid black tiles on their social media channels. Some days later, an official statement was released.

"Our hearts go out to Joey's family and loved ones at this time of tremendous loss," it read. "Joey Jordison's art, talent and spirit could not be contained or be held back. Joey's impact on Slipknot, on our lives, and on the music that he loved, is incalculable. Without him there would be no us. We mourn his loss with the entire Slipknot family. We love you, Joey."

"I LIKE THE QUIET. I LIKE TO GET AWAY FROM THE NOISE AND THE CHAOS"
JOEY JORDISON

Around the world, fans shared their own memories of modern metal's most influential drummer, trading anecdotes of life-changing gigs, coincidental meetings and simple acts of kindness Joey had displayed. Weeks on, his passing scarcely seems real.

This writer will always have the memory of being shown around Des Moines by Joey and Shawn in October 1999 for Slipknot's first UK cover feature, Joey practically levitating with excitement in the passenger seat of Shawn's Jeep as he pointed out places of interest in Slipknot's formative days – SR Audio (the birthplace of their debut album, *Mate. Feed. Kill. Repeat*), the Sinclair garage, even Shawn's parents' home, in whose garage the cover photo for the *Slipknot* album was taken. The band were due to play their first UK show that December, and Joey's hunger to experience the next chapter in Slipknot's great adventure was tangible.

"We always remember where we came from and how hard it was to get here," he said that evening, as The Nine assembled ahead of a sold-out homecoming show at the 1,500-capacity Super Toad Entertainment Center, "which is why we'll kick 100% of your ass every night. If you keep a baboon in a cage for 24 years, the beast has got some shit to work out when it's released."

Monte Conner, the man responsible for giving Slipknot a platform for their art at Roadrunner Records, responds instantly when asked to assess Joey Jordison's legacy.

"Joey's legacy will be that he, along with Paul, Corey and Clown, was the driving creative force behind one of the greatest and most unique metal bands of all time, and of course one of the best drummers the metal world has ever seen," he says. "This is a man who co-wrote the *Iowa* album, the heaviest record ever to hit No.1 on the UK charts. His songs will live on forever for a new generation of metal fans… because their message is timeless." H

VIMIC: PRESS. SINSAENUM: PRESS/ANTHONY DUBOIS.

Sinsaenum: Joey's blackened death metal supergroup

THE SONGS THAT MADE A LEGEND

From Slipknot to Murderdolls to his final songs, here are the tracks that defined Joey's career

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

(SIC)
SLIPKNOT, 1999
An explosive opening statement like no other, Slipknot's debut album simply erupted, powered by Joey's extraordinary drumming, fast and gnarly enough to rival the most extreme bands in metal. Sic(k), indeed.

EYELESS
SLIPKNOT, 1999
A matchless collision between DJ Sid Wilson's tooth-rattling jungle beats and Joey's ultra-intense battery, *Eyeless* still takes some beating for sheer ferocity.

SURFACING
SLIPKNOT, 1999
A new national anthem for Maggots everywhere, *Surfacing* would have been *considerably* less ferocious with any other drummer keeping the beat.

PEOPLE = SHIT
SLIPKNOT, 2001
Blastbeats at No.1? One man made *that* happen. Slipknot's second album conquered the world, bringing brutality to the masses like never before.

IOWA
SLIPKNOT, 2001
A final, devastating plunge into the depths of Hell, *Iowa*'s title track hinges on Joey's slithering, amorphous grooves: a dark glimmer of humanity in an ocean of sickness.

DEAD IN HOLLYWOOD
MURDERDOLLS, 2002
Channelling his sleaziest instincts, Joey teamed up with Wednesday 13 and Murderdolls were born. Their debut album, *Beyond The Valley Of The Murderdolls*, was full of snotty, swaggering anthems... like this one!

THE BLISTER EXISTS
SLIPKNOT, 2004
Kicking off the immaculate *Vol.3* with an avalanche of wild percussion and syncopated ferocity, *The Blister Exists* is simply one of Joey's crowning moments.

DUALITY
SLIPKNOT, 2004
Slipknot's biggest song? Almost certainly. *Duality* is also one of Joey's sharpest and most inventive performances. Massive, undeniable, ageless.

VERMILION
SLIPKNOT, 2004
Joey's chops as a balls-out, brutal drummer are undisputed, but songs like *Vermilion* showcased the subtlety and ingenuity that drove his playing.

WARHEAD
OTEP, 2004
An early creative hook-up with a kindred spirit, Joey played drums on most of Otep's second album, *House Of Secrets*. As always, he fucking ripped.

ANNIHILATION BY THE HANDS OF GOD
ROADRUNNER UNITED, 2005
As a Roadrunner United team captain, Joey collaborated on this vicious cut with Deicide's Glen Benton and Rob Barrett from Cannibal Corpse. Pure savagery.

STITCH HER FURTHER
NECROPHAGIA, 2005
Joey contributed lyrics and vocals to this nasty deep cut by horror metal legends Necrophagia. A massive horror fan, Joey was clearly in his bloody element.

GEMATRIA (THE KILLING NAME)
SLIPKNOT, 2008
One of Slipknot's darkest and most terrifying songs of all, *All Hope Is Gone*'s fiery opener is dominated by an absurdly powerful performance from Mr. Jordison.

BUTCHER'S HOOK
SLIPKNOT, 2008
Nonchalantly mastering a lurching, Meshuggah-style polyrhythm on this unsung gem, Joey was audibly determined to drag Slipknot into new and gnarly territory with *Butcher's Hook*.

DEVIL'S HOLE GIRLS AND THE BIG REVOLUTION
ROB ZOMBIE, 2010
After playing drums with Rob Zombie on tour, Joey hit the studio and gave this thunderous anthem his customary levels of untamed might.

MY DARK PLACE ALONE
MURDERDOLLS, 2010
With hindsight, this swaggering, ghoulish highlight from Murderdolls' superb second album feels unbearably poignant. It still rocks insanely hard, however.

BLOOD HOST
SCAR THE MARTYR, 2013
Scar The Martyr's sole, self-titled album really deserves a second glance, not least due to pitch-black, groove-driven chin-smashers like this one.

ARMY OF CHAOS
SINSAENUM, 2016
A righteous slab of pure death metal fury, this was the sound of Joey Jordison in his brutal, blasphemous element.

SIMPLE SKELETONS
VIMIC, 2016
Although seemingly ill-fated, Vimic did help to get Joey back in action after years of illness. This 2016 single was a sharp and idiosyncratic calling card.

MY SWAN SONG
SINSAENUM, 2018
A towering, tumultuous epic with a heart of purest black, *My Swan Song* was, fittingly, the last song Joey ever performed live. Pure dark magic.

"HIS HEART WAS AS BIG AS HIS DRUMMING"

Murderdolls bandmate and dear friend Wednesday 13 opens up on Joey's impact on him as a musician and as a person

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

When did you first make contact with Joey?
"It was the end of the touring cycle for *Iowa* and he was going to put this new band together straight afterwards. I was with my daughter, who was three at the time, eating dinner, and then Joey calls me. He said, 'This is Joey from Slipknot' and I went, 'Which one are you? There's like 20 of you guys!' He thought that was really funny. I knew Slipknot but I wasn't a fan – I was a punk rock dude – and I think that made him like me even more. I didn't know this at the time because I'd never been out of North Carolina, but Iowa and where I am from were pretty much the same kind of place. We had such a bond instantly; when I thought of Slipknot I thought, 'There is no way I'm gonna get on with the guy from this band', and he turned out to be one of my best friends."

How did the horror theme of Murderdolls come about?
"In the beginning it was a collaboration; we'd been doing our own thing and we combined it. The songs we already had, *Dawn Of The Dead* or whatever, were a nod to horror movies. I'd ask Joey, 'What are your favourite movies?' He'd say, '*The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, Phantasm, Dawn Of The Dead…*' I'd be like, 'Did we just become best friends?' It was an extension of the things we loved and liked to geek out on."

How did you two work together?
"I'd never worked with a producer! I didn't really know what they did. I knew Joey was a fan of my music and he liked my voice, but going into the studio with him was different. I went in on the first day and I was confident, I had this line and I was ready to track it, like, 'I got this.' I do the line and look into the booth and go, 'How was that?' and Joey comes back to me and says, 'How about try it again… and this time don't suck!' It made me go, 'OK fucker, let's see what you think of this!' He had a really good way of getting the best out of me."

What was the tour for the first album like?
"That first tour, I'd just turned 26 years old. I'd been dreaming about this since I was 10 years old. I didn't drink before Murderdolls toured, but we'd play a show then drink for four hours afterwards and have a good time. The buzz in the UK was huge because of Slipknot. It was people who were sick of nu metal – we were a breath of fresh air. It was as fun for us as it was the audience. We couldn't believe we had this crazy audience with their eyebrows shaved! We'd send Joey crowdsurfing through the venue and over to the bar. We'd say, 'OK, we're gonna send Joey over to you, but you can't hurt him! Don't pull his clothes off!' He'd get to the bar, the barman would have a shot of Jack Daniel's and he'd neck it and then they'd surf him back. We did it at every show."

Murderdolls: "a breath of fresh air"

"HE WANTED TO DO MURDERDOLLS AGAIN"

What did Murderdolls give Joey that Slipknot maybe didn't?
"He got to express his sense of humour. Slipknot are so heavy and he was such a badass drummer that he couldn't joke about. But Murderdolls was such a non-serious thing; he loved the over-the-top stage show and the fun element, and it actually scared him a bit because he thought people wouldn't take him seriously anymore. But it was fine, everyone just loved him."

How would you define Joey as a person?
"That is a hard one. Most people look at him as his ability as a musician and a drummer. But that dude had a smile and a personality as big as one of his drum solos. That's what I'll miss. He could play music all day, but the bond we had transcended all of that. He's absolutely the best musician that I ever played with, and he brought out so much in me. His heart was as big as his drumming."

How much did you keep in contact?
"We kept in contact, it was just kind of texting, Slipknot were playing and I was on tour. But, actually, it was maybe three or four years ago, we had a day off near Iowa and we went to Joey's for a barbeque and just hung out. That was the first time we had connected in a long time. I could tell he wasn't the same Joey touring around the world with this huge band, but he was still my friend and I didn't want to pry too much. I just wanted to reconnect with him. In fact, he was going, 'We gotta do Murderdolls again!' and we were talking about doing it. We'd been going back and forth even up until three months ago. I've got the last text from him here; he woke up and he was watching *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and he messaged me, and suddenly it was all back to the old chat. He said, 'Brother, I love you, keep your horns up.' That was a month and a half before he passed away, and I keep kicking myself: 'Should I have contacted him more? Should I have reached out?' I have a lot of memories and most of them are good. I'll never have another friend or writing partner like him again. He changed my world and he changed the world of music, and I'll never have another guy like that again. Anyone that got to know him, they are blessed, believe me."

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ROB MONK/FUTURE

DRUMMER. METALHEAD. LEGEND.

Joey's friends, peers and biggest fans remember the man behind the kit

OLLY CURTIS/FUTURE. ADDITIONAL REPORTING: STEPHEN HILL.

"He was one of the most passionate people I've ever met about music. He loved metal, the bands, everything. I'm a bit like that, but he was next level. He was still a fan after all these years. He was very kind and, due to who he was and what he had done, he could be very serious sometimes, but with us we saw the kind man. When we are in France and we say hi to each other – before the pandemic, of course – we kiss each other on the cheek. He incorporated that into his behaviour, to the point where even in other parts of Europe he would walk up to people and take their hand and say, 'Hi, I'm Joey,' and then lean over and kiss them on both cheeks. That's how genuinely nice and caring he was. Very kind, very passionate, and it's such a shame he has gone."

Frédéric Leclercq, Sinsaenum

"What I've been thinking about for the last few weeks is that… I mean, he was hilarious. He made me laugh. We just had all these inside jokes and I don't really know anyone else who knows [1986 Keanu Reeves crime thriller] *River's Edge* as much as he did! Ha ha. We'd text each other these random quotes just to say hi. He would be under the riser behind my kit, yelling things at me while I was playing; he would leave notes on my kit and on my drum stool, like, 'Don't fuck up!' or 'I'll be watching you!', and then you look over and he's by the side of the stage air-drumming, popping his head into our dressing room and going '*Larian*!' He loved the song *Capillarian Crest* from *Blood Mountain* and he had reduced it to '*Larian*'. You'd hear him saying it, then he'd be gone.

"He was just a lovely, hilarious, funny dude. We hardly ever talked about drums. Not to say we never talked about drums – we'd congratulate each other on every show, he was a big cheerleader for me. There was no competition, he was just a really supportive friend. I just miss my friend, I feel like he's one of my childhood friends, like someone I always knew, someone that I grew up with. He just reminded me of all the kids I used to hang around with when I was a kid and I had my little Metallica earrings; a little headbanger who played drums and wanted to start a thrash band. We were basically the same person moving through life in different parts of the world. It sucks to lose a person in your life who is like that."

Brann Dailor, Mastodon

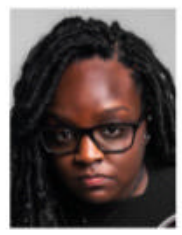
"I almost played bass for the Murderdolls on their first show in the UK. Their bassist couldn't make the gig and Joey was a Wildhearts fan, so he reached out through a mutual friend. In the end it didn't happen, but I became friends with Joey from that point. We had a similar approach to partying, which tended to land him in more trouble than me. We often spoke about making an album together which, I think, made more industry people nervous than excited. I didn't push it as I figured he'd be here forever. I'll regret that forever."

Ginger Wildheart, The Wildhearts

Acey and Joey: Murderdolls and mates

"Joey held the responsibility of having more talent and creativity than anyone I've met. Talent and creativity along with a commitment to an artistic vision that wouldn't compromise. People with these traits who succeed usually end up as arrogant ass clowns. Not Joey. Joey's humility, humour and sincerity are rarely found in people who excel. Anyone who has that incendiary drive to push the limits is bound to burn bright, but burn fast. Joey, as a bandmate you set the bar higher than anyone and I will always be grateful to you. It's heartbreaking to know that we won't share the stage again physically, but I promise you: I'm going to commit to carrying you with me at every show I play, until I can't play any longer."

Acey Slade, Murderdolls



"When people say that Joey Jordison and Slipknot brought aggressive metal to the mainstream, they are not lying. I remember being 14 years old, and even though I was in the infant stage of my heavy music journey, Slipknot instantly resonated with me, as they did for a lot of other kids my age at that time. A huge part of that was Joey Jordison. His unmatched talents as a drummer, charisma as a performer, and character as an entertainer made him stand out from the rest. It was impossible not to notice and it instantly drew me in. Even though I am a guitar player, he was the very first drummer that became one of my heavy music heroes

PRESS. GETTY.

– I had his posters all over my wall. The black Pearl kit, the black Ahead brand drumsticks, among many other unique traits – everything he did was so recognisable and I know for a fact there will never be another like him. He will always have an incredibly special place in my heart."
Diamond Rowe, Tetrarch

"One night in New York City in 2007, we had just finished a tour and Joey was in town. We all ended up continuing the party at his hotel room. We were all in varying states of mind. I had never told him that I wasn't a Slipknot fan nor was I going to tell him, but he obviously figured it out somehow 'cos he came up to me and said, 'Hey Cam, I know you're not a Slipknot fan but we're still friends and we made a killer record together' [Joey produced 2007's *Fire Up The Blades*]. It was awkward for a moment, but I told him his band status had no bearing on how I regarded him as a person. We shook hands, it was all good. He later expressed frustration at how many considered Slipknot a nu metal band and he hated that."
Cam Pipes, 3 Inches Of Blood

Sammy Urwin: excellent taste from a young age

"I was so obsessed with Slipknot when I was younger, I managed to convince my mum to let me go to school dressed as Joey Jordison for World Book Day one year. My reasoning was that I had just read the Slipknot book *Inside The Sickness, Behind The Masks* and thought biographies should count too. I feel like when Slipknot were blowing up, Joey was the member everyone talked about the most. I mean, people just couldn't get their heads around the stuff he was playing. He had an irrefutable impact on heavy music and was so essential to bringing more extreme styles of playing to a larger audience. I remember *Eeyore* and *People = Shit* being the first songs I heard with blastbeats in them, and it completely blew my mind.

In 2003 I got tickets to my first ever big show which was Murderdolls and Stone Sour at Brixton Academy. I had the time of my life at that show, and it further inspired me to want to be in a band of my own one day. Thanks for the inspiration, RIP #1."
Sammy Urwin, Employed To Serve

"For me, Joey was and is a crucial part of the reason why Slipknot are the acclaimed metal gods of my generation. The rattling technical speed and power of Joey Jordison's drumming had me hooked on Slipknot from the moment I heard *(Sic)*. I've never fallen for a band so heavily. They brought me and my brother closer with a shared passion and love of metal from a very early age. Their community, The Maggots, gave me a place when I felt different to the people around me, and a lyrical message to stand by when I felt as pissed off and angry at the world as they were. I dressed up as Joey once to go pick my brother up from school, for God's sake! I think that says it all. RIP Joey. And thanks for all you've done for drumming and metal."
Loz Taylor, While She Sleeps

"One memory I have of Joey that I'll never forget would be when he sent a merch care package to my house as a kid. When he heard I was a big Slipknot fan, he mailed over shirts, hats, a backpack and sticks to our house for me to have. It was something he never had to do, but the fact that he went out of his way to hook me up with that just because he knew I was a fan, is something that will stick with me for the rest of my life."
Max Portnoy, Tallah

"I'll always be, first and foremost, most appreciative to how he treated [my son] Max. He was his favourite drummer and he was so kind, gracious and humble to him when he was a kid. Under the mask of this extreme and brutal drummer was a kind soul. You always think that someone is going to be around forever and you always imagined there would be a day when Joey would be up there again with Slipknot, in some capacity; you assumed there would be another chapter, but this shows nothing is guaranteed. You have to love and appreciate everyone while they're here, and I wish I'd reached out more the last few years. But the way he'll be remembered by the industry is as a groundbreaker; he was the guy who took extreme metal drumming into the mainstream, and if you look at the classic metal drummers of the last 30 years he's got to be at the top of the list. He had such an impact on so many young metal drummers, he definitely made his mark, and left a legacy to be very, very proud of."
Mike Portnoy, Liquid Tension Experiment

Joey Jordison will always have a place in the hearts of so many

ALL PRESS. SAMMY URWIN: PRESS/ANDY FORD. CHILDHOOD PIC: COURTESY OF SAMMY URWIN.

OLLY CURTIS/FUTURE

THE BIGGEST PROJECT *(ER, THAT DOESN'T REALLY

It's the most ambitious tribute album ever: 53 artists covering songs from *The Black Album*! From Ghost to Biffy, we speak to some of *The Metallica Blacklist*'s most exciting – and surprising – participants

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

"The best moments just appeared out of nowhere," says Metallica guitarist Kirk Hammett of his band's fifth album. "Parts of it kind of wrote themselves. To me, that's real magic. I don't know how else to explain it."

Magic or not, it worked. That record – officially self-titled but, of course, known to the world as *The Black Album* – is the biggest metal album of the last 30 years, and second only to AC/DC's *Back In Black* in the all-time rankings. Since it was released on August 12, 1991, it has sold more than 30 million copies worldwide, turning its creators into superstars on a scale that the four greasy street rats who released *Kill 'Em All* eight years earlier could never have conceived – and casting a monolithic shadow over every other metal album that came after it.

Kirk's breezy memories of *The Black Album*'s genesis don't tell the whole story. Sessions found the band holed up in a Hollywood studio for 10 grinding months, often at war with their new producer Bob Rock, racking up a $1.2 million bill in the process. "It was tough, but there was never any hesitation or doubt about going down the wrong road," says Kirk. "When we looked at everything, we fucking knew we had fucking great material."

Not everyone was onboard with the new, streamlined Metallica of *The Black Album*, but the sceptics were swiftly steamrolled into the ground as the platinum discs racked up and the audiences grew bigger. Yet this was more than just an unstoppable commercial juggernaut – the success of songs such as *Enter Sandman*, *Sad But True*, *The Unforgiven* and grandstanding ballad *Nothing Else Matters* pushed Metallica out of the cloistered world of metal into the mainstream. Suddenly *The Black Album* became the metal album that non-metal fans loved.

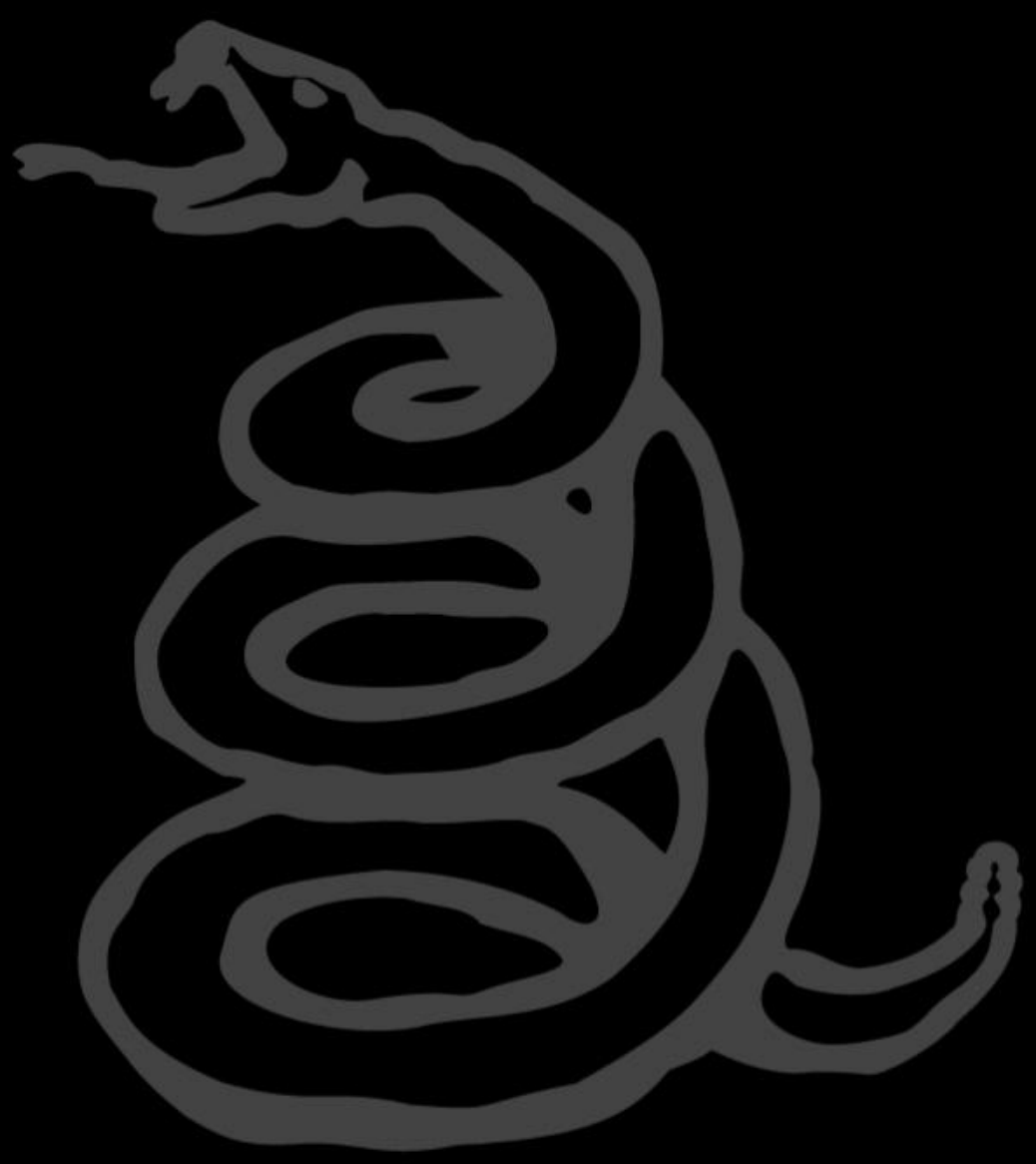
And its cross-cultural impact is as relevant as ever 30 years on. A blockbusting reissue of *The Black Album* is being accompanied by *The Metallica Blacklist*, an epic compilation featuring covers of the album's 12 tracks by 53 different artists from all parts of the musical spectrum. Modern metal icons Ghost, Corey Taylor, The Hu and Volbeat line up next to everyone from genre-mashing pop chameleon Rina Sawayama and vein-busting aggro-punks IDLES to reggaeton superstar J Balvin and pop royalty in the shape of Elton John and Miley Cyrus.

"If you're going to cover a song, put your own personality into it, change it, fuck with it," says Kirk of the tracks on *The Metallica Blacklist*. "The more fucked-up these versions are, the bigger the smiles on our faces."

Today, *The Black Album* stands as a landmark in metal and beyond. We asked a bunch of the people who covered its songs for *The Metallica Blacklist* why it's so important…

METALLICA EVER*

INVOLVE METALLICA)



THE OCCULT ONE

Metallica "brought the girls in" by adding ballads to *The Black Album*, says Tobias

"I WANTED OUR VERSION TO SWING!"

Ghost mainman and Friend Of Metallica Tobias Forge on making *Enter Sandman* his own

ENTER SANDMAN COVERED BY GHOST

How did you end up covering this song?
Tobias Forge: "We'd been asked to play *Enter Sandman* when Metallica were at [Swedish awards ceremony] The Polar Prize a few years back. We said, 'Can we choose which song?' They said, 'Well, you can choose, but we really want you to do *Enter Sandman*. If you're going to open the show, we want you to play their biggest song.' So when talk of this record came about, it made sense."

How do you approach a song that's so well known?
"It's hard to cover a song that famous, but I heard a little bit more melody in the chord sequence. So I thought I'd explore that and see if I could flip it into something different – not better, just different. It's such a rock'n'roll song, too – I wanted our version to swing."

When did Metallica come into your life?
"My older brother was a Metallica fan, so they were always present when I was growing up. I actually had a poster from *Metal Hammer* on my wall – it had the *Jump In The Fire* demon on it, but with a *Master Of Puppets*-era picture."

What was it about *The Black Album* that grabbed you?
"Like most people, *Enter Sandman* was the first thing I heard. As soon as it came on MTV or the radio, I would just stop: 'Here comes this song again.' It was unique and powerful and just very rocking."

Did you see them on *The Black Album* tour?
"I saw them a few times. There was always something special about that stage [the Snake Pit]. It had a kind of magical power. But what really blew me away about that period was the *Year And A Half In The Life Of Metallica Parts 1* and *2* documentary. I've seen it over a hundred times. I'd probably seen it 60 times before I even went into a studio to record my first demo. It became a handbook – this is how you make a record and this is how you tour it."

What struck a chord with so many people outside of the metal world?
"It was the ballads that made the album so successful. *Nothing Else Matters*, Guns N' Roses' *November Rain*… these were the songs that were on the radio. If you went to the school disco, *Nothing Else Matters* was the song they played as the slow dance. You associate it with your first kiss or your first romance, especially if you were a teenager. It found its way into the romantic side of life, and it brought the girls in. That's the difference between selling two million records and selling 20 million."

You know the guys in Metallica these days. What would the 15-year-old Tobias Forge have thought of that?
"Utter amazement, of course. I have moments when I've been on tour with them, or worked with them, where the older, slightly more blasé version of myself gets a little tap on the shoulder from my younger self: 'This is fucking cool!'"

THE POP ONE

"ENTER SANDMAN ABSOLUTELY SLAPS!"

Metal-loving pop chameleon Rina Sawayama on unleashing her inner Hetfield

How did you get into Metallica?
Rina Sawayama: "I first started listening to Metallica when I was around 13 years old, after being introduced to them by a friend who was really into metal. The first Metallica song I ever heard, I think, was *Enter Sandman*, and it absolutely slapped. I rediscovered them when I was listening through inspiration for [Rina's 2020 debut album] *SAWAYAMA* and [co-producer] Clarence Clarity added songs to our shared playlist we work from."

What impact have they had on your music?
"My music blends a lot of different genres, but I always find myself taking inspiration from metal. Songs like *STFU!* and *XS* obviously have metal/nu metal influences, but even my earlier songs like [2017's] *Alterlife* do as well. I love matching pop production with crunchy guitar riffs and an epic guitar solo – both of which Metallica are the absolute kings of."

So how did you channel your inner Hetfield?
"Ha ha! I definitely attempted to channel Hetfield! I hope he'll be able to tell. And we've snuck in some of his vocals, like, right at the beginning that then blends into a firework and a flamethrower! Ha ha! I recorded two days before an acoustic set I did for NPR's *Tiny Desk* [live concert series] and ended up losing my voice in between – I wanted to make it perfect, but it felt like my vocal cords were bleeding by the end of the session."

What did it mean to you to be asked to contribute to *The Metallica Blacklist*?
"It was an absolute honour, I'm in such great company. It was especially great knowing that all proceeds from my cover of *Enter Sandman* will go to Metallica's All Within My Hands Foundation and my charity of choice, Positive East. They're a charity that I have worked with for many years and do incredible grassroots work in supporting those with HIV/AIDS, as well as educating on the topic."

GHOST: PRESS.

Rina shredded her vocal cords, but it was all for a great cause!

ENTER SANDMAN COVERED BY RINA SAWAYAMA

RINA SAWYAMA: PRESS/GREG LIN JIAJIE. BIFFY CLYRO: PRESS.

THE COW-TESTED ONE

Biffy Clyro recorded *Holier Than Thou* on a farm, because why not?

HOLIER THAN THOU COVERED BY BIFFY CLYRO

"YOU CAN'T OUT-METALLICA METALLICA!"

Biffy Clyro's James Johnston on their bovine-approved *Black Album* cover

You've covered *Holier Than Thou*, but you've definitely Biffy'd it up…
James Johnston (bass/vocals): "You're never going to out-Metallica Metallica, so there's no point even trying. We've changed it, but I hope we've been respectful. We had so much fun – we recorded it at our new studio, which is on a farm in the middle of nowhere. Just us and the cows."

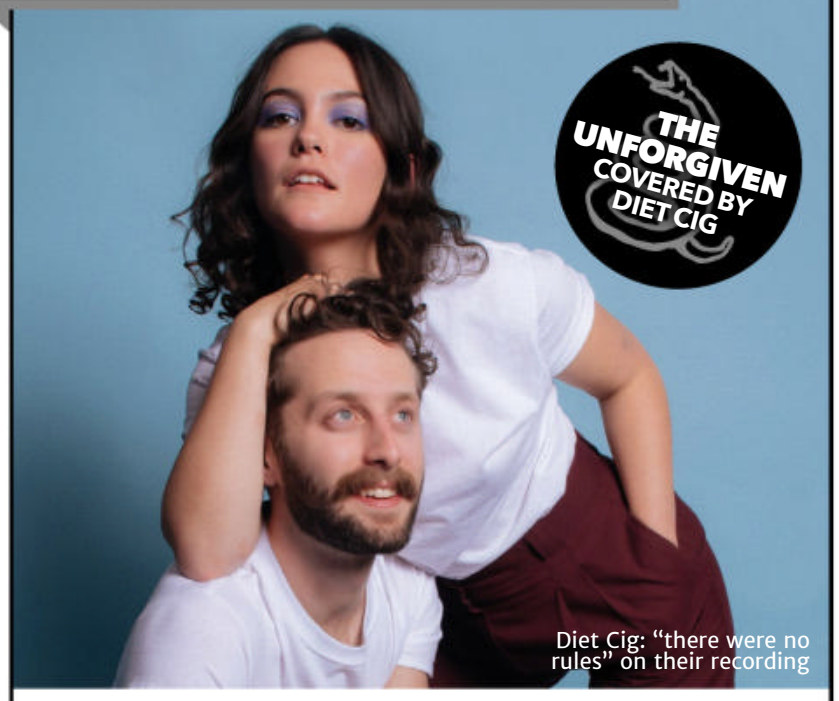
When did Metallica come into your life?
"It's a funny question – it's like asking, 'When did you discover gravity?' They've always been there. We got to play with them in India and that's when you go, 'God, this band are so fucking huge everywhere you go.'"

Did you get to hang out with them?
"We did. They came to say hello, spent a bit of time with us. They were very gracious. Lars was watching Ben [Johnston, Biffy drummer] from the side of the stage, and it was all Ben could do not to drop his sticks. They say, 'Don't meet your heroes', but I can't say enough nice things about those guys."

How have Metallica influenced Biffy?
"Their lack of compromise. They're fearless when it comes to taking a left turn, but they've never lost their edge. That's inspiring to us."

And what do the cows think of your Metallica cover?
"Oh, they're pretty nonplussed by it."

THE INDIE-ROCK ONE



Diet Cig: "there were no rules" on their recording

"METALLICA TRANSCEND METAL!"

US duo Diet Cig give *The Unforgiven* the sped-up makeover it didn't know it needed

You've covered *The Unforgiven*. How do you approach a song that's so well-known?
Noah Bowman (drums): "That's the fun thing – there were no rules. We were like, 'Let's take this slower, ballady song and do what we do.' We play a little bit faster, so we sped everything up in the chorus."
Alex Luciano (guitar/vocals): "Taking these lyrics that were really dark was a challenge to me. Our engineer was, like, 'Do you want to change "*The old man dies...*" to "*The old woman dies*"? I'm like, 'We are not changing the lyrics to this classic song. I'll make it work.'"

You weren't born when *The Black Album* came out, right?
Alex: "I was born in 1995, but these songs are on the radio all the time. It's an inescapable force they have."
Noah: "You walk down the street and you hear *Enter Sandman* coming out of a bar and it's, [approvingly] 'Yeah, Metallica...' They're ingrained in our brains."

What is it about Metallica that makes them so popular across the board?
Alex: "Metallica transcend metal. I know of Slayer and Megadeth, but I couldn't name a song. But Metallica are relevant in every sphere, not just metal."

Have you met a member of Metallica yet?
Alex: "Not yet. We were joking when we were recording that maybe we'd get invited to a listening party on a private island owned by Metallica."
Noah: "We're still waiting for our invite."

THE QUIFFED-UP ONE

"I WAS REALLY NOT INTO ENTER SANDMAN AT FIRST!"

How Volbeat's Michael Poulsen went from *Black Album* sceptic to Metallica cheerleader

You picked *Don't Tread On Me*, which isn't really one of the super-famous *Black Album* songs. Why that one?
Michael Poulsen: "Basically because we didn't want to touch any of the big, huge hits on that record. I could totally hear the Volbeat swing we could put into *Don't Tread On Me*. We upped the tempo and changed the chorus a little bit. We're gonna try and put it in the setlist when we go out and play live."

When did you first hear *The Black Album*?
"It was one of my sisters who told me about it. I love all of the early Metallica albums – I was really inspired by them early in my own career. My sister asked me if I'd heard the new Metallica song. I was like, 'What song?' And she said, '*Enter Sandman*, they're playing it every 10 minutes on MTV.' And she was right. When I heard it the first time, I was not really into it – I just couldn't figure it out, even though I was a huge Metallica fan. Maybe it was 'cos I was mostly listening to a lot of extreme metal at the time."

What changed?
"So I forgot about it until I borrowed the record from a sweet girl who had it. I picked it up and forgot all about it until she asked to get it back. I was like, 'Oh yeah, I'll listen to it now.'
"I was blown away: 'Wow, why didn't I put this on this record earlier?' First of all, the production was insanely good – it was so heavy and everything sounded amazing. On top of that, they're just great songwriters – the melodies were upfront, and I'm a sucker for melodies."

Not everyone loved the album at the time, though.
"No, everything was so divided. I had friends who were really digging it and loved it and treated it like the holy grail, and others who just weren't into it. Some of the real metal dudes didn't like the album 'cos it wasn't thrashy enough – the kind of complaints where you just go, 'Oh, shut the fuck up.'
"But then other people started listening to Metallica, who wouldn't have normally listened to them, like the girl I hooked up with. That was her first heavy rock album."

What has *The Black Album* taught you as a musician?
"I don't know if I actually learned anything from it as a musician until I was trying to rewrite *Don't Tread On Me* as a Volbeat song – that's when you really get a lot of inspiration. But then I've been inspired by Metallica throughout my whole career."

***Don't Tread On Me* aside, what's your go-to *Black Album* song?**
"It would probably be *Sad But True*. It's extremely heavy and it's very melodic and the sound is amazing. It has everything."

Michael Poulsen loves *The Black Album* for its melodies – and fuck the haters

DIET CIG: PRESS/EMILY DUBIN. VOLBEAT: PRESS/ROSS HALFIN

THE THROAT-SINGING ONE

The Hu warm up their necks to do *Through The Never* justice

THROUGH THE NEVER COVERED BY THE HU

"REPRESENTING MONGOLIA IS AN HONOUR FOR US!"

The Hu take *Through The Never* on a trip across the Steppes

This is your second Metallica cover after 2020's *Sad But True*. Is it easier second time around?
Jaya (jaw harp / multi-instrumentalist): "We received a lot of support from the Metallica camp and they even shared our cover music video on their social media, captioning it 'Sad But HU!' That's why we were invited to feature on *The Blacklist*. It was an absolute honour for us to be a part of this project because we love *The Black Album* and grew up listening to it. Yes, it was easier second time around."

Why did you choose the song *Through The Never*?
Temka (tovshuur): "We had several options to choose from, but we chose *Through The Never* because we felt it was the best choice for our style of music. We love how it turned out."

Galaa (lead throat singer / morin khuur): "We used our traditional instruments such as morin khuur, tovshuur and tumur khuur. Without the throat singing there's no Hunnu Rock, so we included throat singing as well."

You sing it in Mongolian, like your other songs. Why?
Enkush (lead morin khuur / throat singer): "Representing Mongolia and its culture is an honour for us. We're not concerned about language, as music can inspire and be enjoyed without borders. Our energy and our music is intended for all people who speak different languages we love but don't always share in common. We hope our songs and our message will transcend any language barriers. Mongolian is the perfect language for throat singing and throat singing is the truest form and method for us to deliver our message in the sincerest way."

How did you get into Metallica in the first place?
Galaa: "We all were introduced to Metallica in our young age. Like millions of people around the world, Metallica have been a huge influence and inspiration for us as music fans and as musicians. We admire their 40 years of relentless touring and the timeless, unique music they have created.

"It is a great honour to show them our respect and gratitude by recording our versions of their incredible songs. We are honoured and grateful to be included in *The Metallica Blacklist*."

THE HU: PRESS/ENKHBAT NYAMKHISHIG. THE HU TOUR THE UK WITH SABATON IN MARCH 2022. FOR MORE, SEE WWW.THEHUOFFICIAL.COM

THE COSMIC COUNTRY ONE

My Morning Jacket: dealing with darkness of life and finding the light

NOTHING ELSE MATTERS COVERED BY MY MORNING JACKET

"METALLICA FOUND FUN IN THE HEAVINESS OF LIFE!"

Jim James of alt-rock linchpins My Morning Jacket on the eternal greatness of *Nothing Else Matters*

What's your relationship with Metallica?
Jim James: "Metallica were one of the first gateways to dealing with the darkness of life and how in the darkness you had to find strength to get through it and find the light. They also had this amazing way of finding fun in the heaviness of life. They really knew how to speak to the hurt and anger I experienced, and then help me turn it into something positive. Plus, their riffs were just insane."

Why did you choose to cover *Nothing Else Matters*?
"I mean, it's just one of the all-time great songs: '*Forever trust in who you are, and nothing else matters.*'"

Why do you think such a diverse range of artists from so many different genres appear on *The Metallica Blacklist*?
"It speaks to the power of music defying genre. We should open up the genres more in general and stop trying to label folks so much."

THE OLD-TIMEY ONE

But of *course* a band containing Pat Wolf would record *Of Wolf And Man*

"THERE'S SOMETHING FORESTY AND MYSTICAL ABOUT IT"

Folk-rockers Goodnight, Texas bust out the banjos for a reimagined *Of Wolf And Man*

How did you end up on *The Metallica Blacklist*?
Avi Vinocur (co-frontman): "I've worked with the band for 13 years now [as a studio hand and occasional onstage mandolin player/backing vocalist]. So when they put the album together, they decided to invite me."

You're the only band who has covered *Of Wolf And Man*. Why pick that song?
Patrick Dyer Wolf (co-frontman): "Not everyone knows that song, which is more of an opportunity for us to do what we did with it. Which is not an unrecognisable transformation, but it's still a pretty different version."
Avi: "I've always liked that song. There's something aggressive about it, but the lyrics are kind of foggy and foresty and mystical. Plus Pat's last name is Wolf, so anything with that in the title is something we gravitate towards!"

OF WOLF AND MAN COVERED BY GOODNIGHT, TEXAS

Have you had any feedback from the band?
Avi: "Yeah, I've been working in their headquarters and they came up to me and went, 'Dude, it's great.' They've been super-nice about it."

MY MORNING JACKET: PRESS/DANNY CLINCH. GOODNIGHT, TEXAS: PRESS.

THE JAZZ ONE

My Friend Of Misery: now forever linked to Billie Holiday thanks to Kamasi Washington

"IF THEY ASK ME TO GUEST ON THEIR NEW ALBUM, I'M DOWN!"

Freewheeling jazz visionary Kamasi Washington serves up a Metallica cover like no other

How does a jazz guy end up covering Metallica?
Kamasi Washington: "I've been a fan since I was a kid, but it was a surprise when they reached out. But I was like, 'Of course I'm down with doing that.'"

You've turned *My Friend Of Misery* into an epic jazz song. Why pick that track?
"That record has so many great songs on it – it was just trying to figure out what song I was hearing something on. I heard something in the music and the rhythm, but then I started digging deeper into the words. When I looked at the lyrics I felt a connection to Billie Holiday."

Billie Holiday?
"Yeah. Billie had this ability to bring beauty out of pain in an amazing way. If anyone was a friend of misery, it was Billie Holiday."

Do all jazz musicians listen to metal on the quiet?
"Ha! We all grew up listening to a variety of music. It was all about finding a record or seeing a performance that spoke to us, and once you found that, you were a fan."

When did Metallica come into your life?
"I grew up in South Central LA. Metallica was on our radar, but it wasn't something everyone was listening to in my neighbourhood. But I had this friend Big B, who had that stereo system in his car that you could hear five blocks away. One day he came down the street and he was bumping *Load*. We were, like, 'Whoa, what is B listening to?' He pulled up and played us some stuff and I was, like, 'This is dope!' And my friend Cameron Graves, he turned me on to the rest of the catalogue: 'Oh snap, this is crazy.'"

Kirk and Robert joined you onstage at the Hollywood Bowl to play *My Friend Of Misery*. Did you know those guys before?
"No. Robert used to play with Suicidal Tendencies, and I had worked with those guys, so it was more like knowing them from afar. But that was our first meeting, when we rehearsed at the Bowl. They absolutely killed."

Can we expect a Kamasi guest spot on the next Metallica album?
"Hey, if they ask me, I'm down."

KAMASI WASHINGTON: PRESS. RODRIGO Y GABRIELA: PRES/EBRU YILDIZ.

Metallica are NOT "bad assholes", according to Gabriela Quintero

THE FLAMENCO ONE

"IT WAS BLASPHEMY TO SAY ANYTHING BAD ABOUT METALLICA!"

Rodrigo y Gabriela's Gabriela Quintero on adding to their arsenal of flamenco-style acoustic 'Tallica covers

When did you first hear Metallica?
Gabriela Quintero: "For me, it was when I was around 15 years old. The tune was *Master Of Puppets*. My sister had a metal boyfriend, and he made a romantic tape for her of all the songs he loved – not just Metallica, Anthrax as well. When she played it, I was like, 'What the hell is that? It sounds incredible.' She went, 'I don't like it, it's shit. You can have it.'"

Rodrigo y Gabriela have form covering Metallica songs – you've done *Orion*, *Battery* and now *The Struggle Within*…
"Back in the day, in another life, Rodrigo and me were in a metal band in Mexico – we attempted to sound like Metallica, Megadeth, Slayer, Pantera, all of them. But Metallica were always the big inspiration."

Can you remember when you first heard *The Black Album*?
"Oh yeah. Back then, the only place you could hear metal on the radio was on this programme around 3am. So we waited up because they were going to play *Enter Sandman*. We were so nervous – like, butterflies in our stomach. They played the song and the older guys were immediately, like, 'Oh, it's soft, it's pop.' For me and Rod, it was blasphemy to say something bad about Metallica because we were such huge fans."

Did Metallica have a big following in Mexico around that time?
"Oh yeah. They played Mexico City on *The Black Album* tour – several nights at this big enormodome place. On the third night, all the fans in the front went crazy and started throwing fireworks onstage. The Metallica guys freaked out, so people started shouting 'Pelotudo!' which is, like, bad asshole. And the band just walked offstage and there was just this silence – 14,000 people just quiet. It was so surreal. The promoter came on and said, 'Please stop, the band need to continue.' Then the band walked onstage with the Mexican flag, and the energy exploded in such a cool way. We were just so happy that it had come back from this dramatic moment."

***THE METALLICA BLACKLIST* IS OUT NOW VIA BLACKENED RECORDINGS. THE *BLACK ALBUM* REMASTER IS AVAILABLE IN MULTIPLE FORMATS – SEE WWW.METALLICA.COM**

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURES: ALINA CHERNOHOR

HOME IS THE HEAR.

WHERE TF IS...

Since fleeing Ukraine seven years ago, Jinjer have become one of metal's biggest international success stories. But vocalist Tatiana is still figuring out where she belongs

"At least once a day, when I'm home in my apartment, I catch myself thinking, 'I wish I could go home.' But I have no idea what that actually *means*."

For Jinjer frontwoman Tatiana Shmayluk, home is a nebulous concept. Having spent the better part of a decade on the road, her Kiev apartment – the setting for today's Zoom chat – has been little more than a glorified storage space. Case in point: when COVID hit, rather than rushing back, she decided to stay in the US, waiting with terminal optimism for everything to blow over so they could continue their tour of the Americas.

But then, neither Tatiana nor her bandmates are actually from Kiev. Growing up, 'home' was Gorlovka, a small city in Ukraine's Donetsk Oblast region. But in 2014 they were forced to leave their childhood homes and families behind, when war broke out between Ukrainian armed forces and Russian-backed separatists.

For the next 18 months, home was a run-down apartment near the Polish border, often living without basic amenities such as heating, electricity or water, and facing discrimination from locals due to their origins in the Eastern part of Ukraine. Little wonder, then, that this was when the band began to play shows internationally, opting to fill their calendars rather than bemoan their lot.

It paid off – when *Hammer* last met with Jinjer, in Germany in October 2019, they were riding high on a summer of sold-out shows and packed festival performances, the enormous crowds at Wacken and Download testament to the band's breakout appeal. Poised to release their third record, *Macro*, Jinjer envisioned a chance to replicate their European success on an intercontinental scale, and booked headline dates in the US, Australia and South America.

In a case of pathetic fallacy, the weather was uncharacteristically gloomy as Jinjer prepared to take the stage at Mexico's Hell & Heaven Metal Fest on March 15, 2020. The band already knew it would be their last show of the tour – all other immediate dates were pulled as COVID-19 began ravaging the planet.

"We had hopes that it would all blow over in a few months or so, but soon all hope was gone," admits bassist Eugene Abdukhanov.

"It felt like a lot of people were just in shock, like they knew nothing would happen for a while," Tatiana adds. "It was a really depressing way to end the tour, but the show itself was great."

While Tatiana waited things out in California, Eugene and the rest of the band headed home to their families in Ukraine. "At that point, I was almost happy to stop and be in the same place for longer than a couple of days!" he admits. "But after three or four months I was getting tour-sick – I craved that feeling of playing live onstage, of seeing my bandmates every day."

Having spent years cooped up together in buses, studios and backstage areas, it's unsurprising that separation anxiety set in. But it also gave Jinjer a chance to regroup and reflect, recognising that across three records and innumerable shows they had developed into a genuine metal sensation, capable of selling out venues internationally and pulling enormous numbers on streaming platforms.

A big part of that success is due to the charismatic Tatiana, her voice ranging from soaring 90s alt-metal cleans to death metal growls and snarls. It's exactly the kind of thing Youtube reaction videos are made for, Tatiana inspiring a host of wide-eyed 'Wait, WHAT?' moments.

"I WAS BASHING PEOPLE AGAINST THE WALL AND SCREAMING"

TATIANA SHMAYLUK

"[Before lockdown], we couldn't really see what we had achieved, because we were always running from one place to another," Eugene says. "After we stopped we could look back and see all this road we'd covered."

"It's crazy how much we needed that," agrees Tatiana. "It gave us a kind of time and perspective that no money could buy."

Unfortunately, this personal development came at the cost of their ambitions for *Macro*. A steady stream of music videos and a live DVD release (last November's *Alive In Melbourne*) kept the band's profile up while touring was on pause, and they even managed to undertake a short international tour in September 2020, playing shows in Germany and Switzerland ("It felt really weird – almost like we were playing a food festival or something," Tatiana says). But they knew they couldn't wait in a state of arrested development forever.

Reconvening in the studio in early 2021, Jinjer found that the music flowed immediately. For Tatiana, however, the process wasn't quite so simple. "We were already well into recording the album and I hadn't written a word!" she admits. "I pulled Eugene aside and said, 'I don't have any idea of what to write about! I only have the darkest and saddest feelings in my mind and I don't feel free to express them, because if I do the whole album is going to just be, 'Wahhhh, I'm so depressed.'"

"I think you were afraid," Eugene points out.

"I *was* afraid!" Tatiana agrees. "How long would people tolerate me whining? But he just said, 'Fuck it! Write what's on your mind!'"

"I told her to be herself," Eugene says. "From there, the ideas burst forth. It's like she was bottling it all up, but once some of it escaped it just kept coming and coming. I saw the lyrics to one song and almost started crying because they were so powerful."

If *Macro* was Jinjer holding a spotlight up to the ugliest parts of the world – covering everything from abuse of power and mental fragility, to direct references to the war and their displacement – *Wallflowers* largely turns that spotlight inwards, allowing Tatiana to vocalise feelings of isolation, depression and dissociation that have long plagued her. In the title track, she sings the lines: '*Your castle is your fortress where you can lick your wounds*', '*Avoiding people / Fall in love with solitude*' and '*I'm a guest in my own skin.*'

"I decided to dedicate this record to my personal, psychological state," Tatiana explains. "Even if people have related to broader issues I've sung about in the past, you don't always need to hear that motivational 'be strong' stuff; sometimes it helps to just have someone say, 'Hey dude, I feel the same way.' I *do* care about what is happening in the world, but I needed to put my thoughts in order."

"Did you manage?" Eugene asks.

"Nope, I'm still totally [makes cuckoo noise]," Tatiana laughs.

Sitting beside Eugene in an apartment she would usually barely spend time in, in a city she can't truly call home, it's understandable that Tatiana might retain some sense of disassociation.

"I had a nightmare recently, that I'd been excluded from Jinjer and

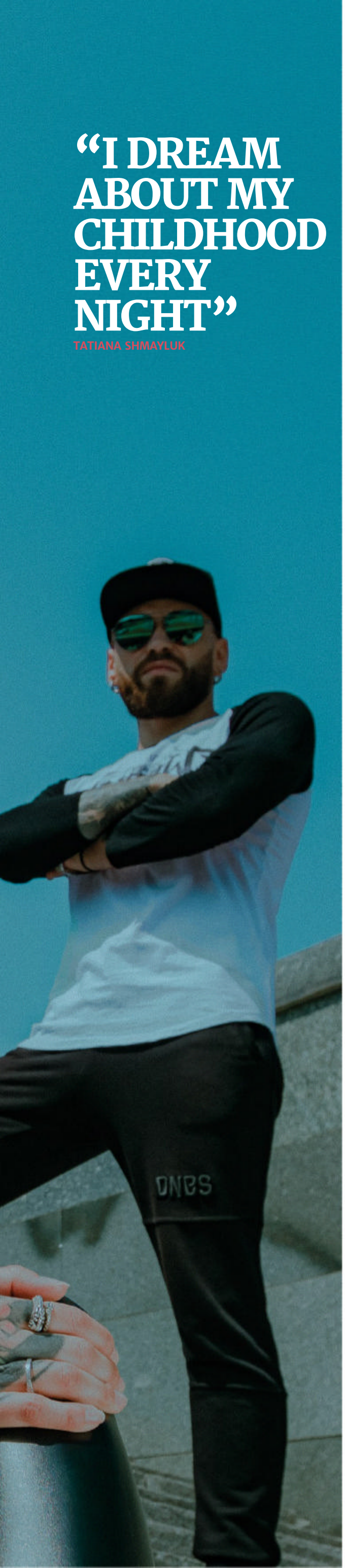
Tatiana Shmayluk: powerhouse

JINJER

It's been a long road, but Jinjer now call themselves a family as well as a band

“I DREAM ABOUT MY CHILDHOOD EVERY NIGHT”

TATIANA SHMAYLUK



nobody would tell me why,” Tatiana recalls. “It was like, ‘You don’t fit anymore.’ And I *cried*, grabbing people by the scruff of their neck and bashing them against the walls, screaming, ‘How could you?!’ Then I woke up so *relieved* it was a nightmare! I often say, ‘I’m going to quit this band, I can’t do this anymore!’ but that dream made me realise that I couldn’t imagine my life without Jinjer.”

If *Macro* was Jinjer’s breakthrough as international artists, *Wallflowers* is the creative breakthrough that puts them in the upper echelons of progressive heavy music. The sheer blistering extremity on display in tracks such as *Call Me A Symbol* and *Copycat* still sits perfectly alongside the mesmeric prog metal of *Colossus* or the album’s lead single, *Vortex*. Chuck in decidedly anthemic vocal melodies on the likes of *Wallflower* or *Disclosure!* – a song that positively oozes Alice in Chains worship – and the elements are there for Jinjer’s most ambitious and emotionally moving record to date.

“We could have sat and cried about not getting to properly tour *Macro*, but that wouldn’t be us,” Eugene explains. “It was a bitter pill, but we swallowed it! We’re not the people that made *Macro* anymore – we’ve grown up a lot and gained more confidence. Now we’re ready to take risks and break boundaries.”

In 2019, Jinjer were a band thrust into the spotlight, still coming to terms with extraordinary events in their recent past. Time may not have healed all their wounds, but it has certainly given them enough space to reflect and regroup. And now, in 2021, they are tighter and more determined than ever.

“Over these years we really became a family – we love each other no matter what,” Eugene tells us. “We can be horrible to each other, even violent, but we’ve learned to move past all of that. I’m lucky to have three homes – where my parents live, where my kids are and wherever my band goes.”

Tatiana is slightly more hesitant. “I think my home is… first, maybe where my childhood was spent,” she admits. “I want to see my parents; I haven’t seen them for two years and I really miss them. I dream about the scenery and scenarios from my childhood every night. But then you realise that you bring home to every place you go; home is a feeling of inner peace.”

***WALLFLOWERS* IS OUT AUGUST 27 VIA NAPALM RECORDS**

JINJER

“SOMETHING MAGICAL HAPPENS WHEN TATIANA RECORDS”

Longtime producer and fellow countryman Max Morton explains why he can’t get enough of Jinjer

HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT JINJER?

“In the mid-2000s we had music forums, and I remember noticing a band with a really cool name – Jinjer. After checking some of their live-in-the-studio demos, I felt they were special. A couple of years later, Eugene contacted me with a job offer. The funny thing is, he wanted to hire me as a videographer for their upcoming single, not as a sound engineer. His music video idea was way beyond my capabilities, so I ended up mixing *No Hoard Of Value* [from debut album *Cloud Factory*] instead!”

WHY HAVE YOU GONE BACK TO PRODUCE THEM AGAIN AND AGAIN?

“We’re close friends, we understand each other without words, and it’s precious. Also, there’s always something magical happening when it’s Tatiana’s turn to record her parts. Before she takes the microphone, the songs only exist as instrumental pieces. No one of us has any idea about the lyrics or the vocal lines. It’s always a mystery unveiled right after I press ‘record’… Tati just records a few takes, usually three – sometimes all completely different – and together we choose the best one.”

WHAT PARTS OF THEIR UKRAINIAN HERITAGE DO THEY BRING TO THEIR MUSIC?

“Jinjer come from the industrial part of Ukraine. And I guess all industrial cities have something in common: they give birth to some of the best metal bands in the history of mankind. Think Black Sabbath or Motörhead. With Jinjer, it’s very similar, it just has some of our Slav flavour. Simple folks who know the price of hard work. Roman [Ibramkhalilov, guitarist] was literally working at the factory back in the day! Their parents were the salt of the earth, the true working class. *No Hoard Of Value* is about the unjust life of miners in Donbass. Or let’s take their *Retrospection* music video: just take a look at their childhood photos, featured there. It will describe things better than a thousand words.”

SPIRITBOX

PRESS/LINDSEY BYRNES

BELIEVE The Hype

Spiritbox are the most celebrated young band in metal right now. But these ain't no overnight sensations; frontwoman Courtney LaPlante has had to battle upheaval, false starts and her own demons to get here

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

When Courtney LaPlante was 15 years old, she moved from her childhood home in humid, conservative Alabama to Vancouver Island, 60 miles west of Canada's British Columbia. The move was intended to be a new start, following her parents' divorce three years before, and as a young, angsty teenager, Courtney had had very little say in the matter. As she gazed out of the window of the ferry transporting her to her new home, at a seemingly endless, cold ocean, she was filled with mounting rage. "I remember thinking, 'What the fuck is my life now?'" she recalls. "I [told] my uncle, 'The *second* I turn 18, I'm coming back to Alabama.' He was like, 'I'm going to bet you in one month, you'll have changed your mind.'"

He was right, of course. Looking back now, Courtney recognises how pivotal the move was, pinpointing it as the beginning of her transformation into the magnetic, personable frontperson she is today. Speaking to *Hammer* over Zoom, she's still a Vancouver Island resident, 17 years after she swore she would leave. The only difference? Now, Courtney is a superstar-in-waiting - the face of post-metalcore trio Spiritbox, the most exciting band in heavy music, and on the cusp of releasing *Eternal Blue*, the most hyped debut album of recent years.

"That was a very sad time for me in my life, to move to a different country, but it gave me a chance to recreate who I was as a person," she recalls, twirling long blue hair between her fingers. "Coming here made me realise my true priorities were completely different to who I was pretending to be when I was down there. Back then I was a sorority girl. Everything had to be perfect. When I was 12 years old, I was already trying to figure out what I needed to do to be the Homecoming Queen when I was 18. That's unhealthy. Then I moved here and the kids I started hanging out with had identities outside of that. They were curating stuff they actually liked, not what society was telling them to do."

Courtney never did become the Homecoming Queen. Instead, when she was 18, she made the decision to pursue music professionally. "I've never had a plan B since," she smiles, and she's never needed one. Later that year, she would meet and befriend her now husband, musical soulmate and Spiritbox guitarist, Michael Stringer, with whom she shares an almost symbiotic creative bond. "He was my cute little friend for many years, and I never thought about him in a romantic way," she says. "The second I saw him play guitar I was like, 'What can I do to make this guy want to be in my band instead of the band he's in?' I *have* to make music with this guy." The pair would go on to join avant-garde metal mob Iwrestledabearonce, but by 2015, they were struggling and disillusioned with the music they were making. "We were playing these really bad shows, not making any money, sleeping in a van," she remembers today. "[It wasn't] bringing anyone any joy."

> **"I WENT TO RECORD AND HAD A FRICKIN' MENTAL BREAKDOWN"**
> COURTNEY LAPLANTE

Soon after, when Iwrestledabearonce disintegrated quietly with little fanfare, Courtney and Michael went to ground to lay the foundations for Spiritbox, a band that would provide them with the sonic fluidity they craved. Cherry-picking from brutal progressive metal, metalcore and emotionally hefty post-metal, they created a lush, genre-bending sound that has opened tech metal up to an audience way beyond chin-stroking aficionados, blowing raspberries at the notion of boundary and what it means to be 'heavy'. "Some of the songs on *Eternal Blue* don't sound like metal songs to me," she muses when asked where she thinks the band slot in 2021's scene. "I'm influenced by so much music I couldn't tell you where we fit."

Spiritbox released their first, self-titled EP in 2017, followed by a blossom

PRESS/TRAVIS SHINN

Spiritbox (left to right):
Bill Crook, Courtney
LaPlante, Michael Stringer

18+

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of singles, including *Blessed Be* and *Rule Of Nines*, which put them on the radar of a small, but enthusiastic group of metal fans. The latter would spawn a wave of reaction videos on Youtube marvelling at Courtney's remarkable silky-to-volatile vocals. ("I try not to watch too many of them because I don't want to get my validation from people on the internet.") But things really exploded last year, when they released their behemoth, industrial-tinged single *Holy Roller*. Accompanied by a horror-inspired music video based on Ari Aster's 2019 film, *Midsommar*, which the band filmed during the pandemic "for like five dollars", they watched in disbelief as the Youtube view counter ticked upwards: hundreds, thousands, then into the millions. "I never thought we'd be putting this album out at this stage at this level of interest," Courtney admits. "People are like, 'How did you guys anticipate making music people really like?' but we're just really lucky. Hopefully my luck lasts for another 20 years."

Following *Holy Roller*, more tracks – the cathartic *Circle With Me* and devastatingly emotional *Constance*, a mediation on the cruelty of dementia – followed, showing off every aspect of the band's multi-faceted sound. "They were never meant to be singles but we had a hard time picking any singles on this record," Courtney reveals. "We wrote it to be listened to from the front to the back." That makes sense when you realise *Eternal Blue* is best approached as a sensory experience: a raw, emotional journey Courtney states is "about dealing with my depression", something that has plagued her since her teenage years. Recording the album, she says, was "physically and mentally exhausting" as she delved again and again into her darkest moments. "Every day I would

"I DON'T WANT MY VALIDATION FROM PEOPLE ON THE 'NET"

COURTNEY LAPLANTE

It's safe to say, Courtney has no regrets about not being Homecoming Queen

PRESS/TRAVIS SHINN

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"WE'VE A LOT TO LEARN BEFORE WE DO A HUGE SHOW"

COURTNEY LAPLANTE

wake up and be more and more tired. It's like acting. Someone has to hear your emotion in their ears, so you have to get into the mentality of whoever the narrator is singing the song. The narrator is usually myself but at different points in my life. It was a safe environment, though; I was with Dan [Braunstein, producer], Bill [Crook, bassist] and Michael, and they are people who love me and were there to protect me if things got too weird."

Her emotions came to a head when recording *Circle With Me*. "I went to record it and I had no confidence," she remembers. "I sounded so bad, and the guys had to pause my recording session. I had a frickin' mental breakdown." All at once, her old go-to of chasing perfection bubbled to the surface again. "The guys were like, 'It's OK Courtney, we can do this again tomorrow,' and I went into a closet in my room and cried and cried. The next day, magic happened. If I hadn't had that breakdown the night before I wouldn't have been able to perform the song like I did the next day."

Given the furore surrounding *Eternal Blue*'s imminent release, it's easy to forget just how green as a band Spiritbox actually are. Having spent their first few years as a mostly visual concept, churning out exceptionally slick music videos, they're yet to properly tour.

"At this point, I've had more shows cancelled as Spiritbox than I've played as Spiritbox," Courtney sighs, referring to the band's two jaunts to date, supporting After The Burial in 2020 and then a few ill-fated US dates with Limp Bizkit earlier this year, which were both called off due to the pandemic. "I'd love to get a tour laminate where I completed the whole tour!" As a result, despite the weight of expectation threatening to sweep them away, she's heading into the eye of the storm, determined to keep her feet planted firmly on the floor. "I want to be an opening band for a long time," she says. "We don't have a team to go on tour with yet and we have a lot to learn before we have the audacity to put on a huge Spiritbox show. I feel like people are going to have expectations of perfection from us and I want to live up to those expectations. I'm not scared of them. They just make me even more inspired." H

***ETERNAL BLUE* IS OUT SEPTEMBER 17 VIA RISE**

Spiritbox: not blue about being green

PRESS/TRAVIS SHINN

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BEST. BLOODSTOCK. EVER.

We went to Bloodstock 2021 and all we got was… a bloody lovely time! Birthday cakes! Stage invasions! Brian Blessed! Here's everything that went down over five crazy days

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE, STEPHEN HILL, RICH HOBSON, ELLIOT LEAVER, TOM O'BOYLE, JONATHAN SELZER, ELIZABETH SCARLETT • PICTURES: TINA KORHONEN

We can hardly believe it. Twenty-thousand people, more than 150 bands and one elephant converged on Catton Park for one of the biggest weekends in metal's history – and we were there. When Bloodstock was cancelled last year, they rallied with Europe's top fests to bring us The European Festival Alliance – an online weekend event to bring us all together in the darkest of times. This year, there's a renewed joy to be back at Catton Park and, thanks to its 20th anniversary, we get *five whole days* of fun. Take our hand, as if we were Festival Jesus, and step this way to read about all the action…

FRIDAY

Napalm Death destroying the Sophie Lancaster Stage. Gotta love 'em!

BLOODSTOCK EXPANDS TO FIVE DAYS! YEP, FIVE DAYS!

Expanded to five days of music as part of its 20th anniversary celebrations, there is a surprisingly sizable turnout for Wednesday and Thursday. New **ONSLAUGHT** vocalist Dave Garnett makes an incendiary (official) live debut in the band's first-day headline slot, while newcomers **URNE** steal the Thursday with their utterly colossal riffs. Fan favourites **RAISED BY OWLS** and **LAWNMOWER DETH** might pack the tent for their brilliantly daft sets, but it's last-minute replacements **PUNK ROCK FACTORY** that provide the biggest surprise, as they lead a metalhead contingent through singalongs of pop-punk covers of everything from *Moana* to *Pokemon*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Frozen*. Utterly ridiculous, but exactly what's needed for a fun start to the festival.

NAPALM DEATH DESTROY A TENT

If there's any fatigue setting in by Friday evening, it certainly doesn't show while **NAPALM DEATH** are onstage. Birmingham's grindcore legends set the Sophie Lancaster Stage off like an angry beehive, as bodies clatter and

"TODAY FEELS LIKE VENOM PRISON'S CORONATION. NO GOING BACK NOW"

Venom Prison's Larissa Stupar lets rip. Superstardom awaits

crash to just shy of 35 years' boundary-pushing extremity. It speaks volumes to Napalm's status as pioneers that they can splice their diverse discography together into a single furious mass, covering everything from the bread'n'butter grind of *On The Brink Of Extinction* or *Smash A Single Digit* to straight-up death metal in *Suffer The Children*, all the way to the proggish extreme metal of *Contagion* or alt-flavoured *Breed To Breathe*.

VENOM PRISON OFFICIALLY STEP UP

A few years ago, the idea that a young, relatively unassuming, British death metal band could play fourth from top on the main stage of the biggest metal festival in the country would have seemed, quite frankly, absurd. Although, back then, we didn't know about **VENOM PRISON**. Today feels like their coronation, with fire bombs going off, their savage, gut-punching riffs slicing through the air and an awe-struck crowd getting to witness the completion of Larissa Stupar's metamorphosis from the reserved bundle of hair she used to be into a heavy metal superstar. On today's showing, there's no going back for Venom Prison now.

DEVIN TOWNSEND

Elephants, aliens and dancing devils – Hevy Devy's fan-picked set brings the party and then some

Friday's Ronnie James Dio stage concludes with the kind of kaleidoscopic effervescence that only **DEVIN TOWNSEND** can create, a none-more-eccentric clash of heavy metal grandstanding and self-effacing nerd-chic that's made him adored by… everyone. Playing a setlist voted for by fans on the Bloodstock website ensures a diverse series of bangers. Acolytes of his frenzied early years greet the explosive groove of Strapping Young Lad's *Aftermath* with neck-snapping glee, followed by the monumental sonic wall that is *Kingdom*.

COVID complications mean Dev's only played one previous gig with his backing musicians – a warm-up show in Manchester the night before – but you wouldn't know. They're locked so tight, even he's surprised. The Ziltoidian battle cry of *By Your Command* builds to a thunderous climax, and saccharine epic *Supercrush!* sounds joyously huge. Headlining theatrics come in the form of a guitar duel with his puppet alter ego Ziltoid, plenty of pyro, and some questionable onstage characters for the pomp'n'shuffle of *Bad Devil*. Ever a man uneasy with the 'rock star' mantle, Devin trips over mid-song and needs to be awkwardly helped up by a bloke in a rubber devil suit – so perfectly Devin Townsend. Only he could shift in just three songs from the heart-rendingly crushing *Deadhead* through to the grinding anti-intimacy of *Love?*, to the hyper-positive singsong of *Spirits Will Collide*, replete with choir and an elephant costume so shonky you expect Ace Ventura to squirm out of its rear end.

After the party culminates with the tongue-in-cheek skeleton dance of *Vampira*, Bloodstock's organisers join Dev onstage to be serenaded with a rendition of *Happy Birthday* for the festival's 20th birthday. Everyone joins in song as fireworks light the night sky, in a fittingly familial conclusion that hammers home just how much we've all missed nights like these.

Hevy Devy: if you don't love him, you're dead inside

WORDS: TOM O'BOYLE. DEVIN INSET: GETTY/KATJA OGRIN.

…OH, AND THIS HAPPENED

The bands that banged our heads off on Friday

Bathed in harsh blue and red lighting, **AGRONA** provide half an hour of blackened death metal to an engaged crowd at the Sophie Lancaster Stage, but would have more impact if their sound wasn't so muddy – everything merges all too often throughout their set.

Over on the Ronnie James Dio Stage, Bristolian post-BM heroes **SVALBARD** put on an impassioned performance, with Serena Cherry emotionally paying tribute to Alexi Laiho and Joey Jordison between their sublime blasts of icy, hardcore-influenced metal. The road has been long for this band, and they grasp their chance with both hands.

Unexpectedly, **RAGING SPEEDHORN** set up a near-riot in the Sophie tent. In part it's down to having grooves that sound like they are being kneaded by knuckledusters, but also because they seem to have swapped Iron Monkey for Beastie Boys as a main point of reference.

"You may have noticed I'm not Matt", jokes **EVILE** frontman Ol Drake. Everybody *has*, of course, but he's stepped into his brother's shoes with gusto and their thrash metal incites pit after pit; it's very much a heroes' welcome back.

On the Hobgoblin New Blood Stage, Gloucestershire metalcore band **BROKEN JAW** are doing their best to incite a party. They're a little dirtier and punkier than their contemporaries, which serves them well, and they win everyone over through sheer force of personality.

SKINDRED. Sub-headliner set. Friday night. You already know how this is going to go, right? An hour of pure, party metal bangers, culminating in a raucous Newport Helicopter during *Warning*, sets the tone perfectly for Hevy Devy to take over. Lovely.

In the meantime, in the Sophie tent, there's **CONAN**. If you love bands that sound as though they're in a wind tunnel – Jane's Addiction, Kylesa, W.A.S.P. – Conan have your back. Jon Davis's wretched, man-against-storm vocals also contend with colossal, doom-laden riffs like slaps from time immemorial.

SATURDAY

Cradle Of Filth's Dani Filth: scary, sexy, haunted and... minty?

SURF'S UP WITH MALEVOLENCE

Sheffield's lairiest metal band making their Bloodstock debut – on the main stage, no less – always had the capacity to be something special, and **MALEVOLENCE** do not disappoint. They absolutely *batter* Bloodstock with an endless supply of fat, Southern-fried riffs and aggy, hardcore beatdowns. When frontman Alex Taylor demands that we "break records" for crowd surfing, Catton duly obliges – there are literally dozens of fans chucking themselves over the barrier come the end of *Remain Unbeaten*. Given they don't necessarily fit the bill of a 'classic' Bloodstock band on paper, it's a moment that feels like an absolute triumph.

DANI FILTH'S MAKE-UP GAME IS FIERCE

A sub-headlining set as the sun starts to retreat, on a massive stage at a heavy metal festival, feels like an open goal for **CRADLE OF FILTH** to tap home. And so it proves, with the Suffolk legends putting on possibly their finest BOA set to date. A mixed set list of gothic, melodramatic black metal classics such as *Her Ghost In the Fog, Cruelty Brought Thee Orchids* and *Nymphetamine (Fix)* sound as timeless as ever. A heavily corpsepainted Dani Filth cavorts around the stage screeching like a scary, sexy, haunted mint humbug, while the fire, pomp, majesty and lunacy of COF is just far too seductive for even the truest of BM fans to deny. Slam dunk.

"SOMEHOW, A CONGA LINE TO *DU HAST* MAKES SENSE"

RAMMSTEIN. CONGA. LINE.

If Bloodstock's main stage feels like one big heavy metal party today, it's nothing compared to what goes down *after* the bands have finished. As drunken revellers sing along to everything from Queen to, er, Lady Gaga at the Hobgoblin New Blood Stage's silent disco, the Sophie Lancaster tent plays host to similar scenes as people mosh to *People = Shit* by Slipknot, jive to *Africa* by Toto and – perhaps most impressively of all – *conga line* to *Du Hast* by Rammstein. If it were any other metal band, it would just seem plain silly. But for Rammstein? Somehow, it all makes perfect sense.

Horns (and wheels) up! Bloodstock is back, baby!

Ye gods, we've missed this

FESTIVAL SITTE: KATJA OGRIN

KREATOR

Kreator: freaking legends

Satan is real! Otherwise, why would the German thrash pioneers still sound this good after four decades?

Initially dirtier, darker, and more sworn to the spit'n'sawdust rebelliousness of Venom than their US counterparts, the German Big 3 – Sodom, Destruction and Kreator – may still be heroes among metal's underground, not least by helping pave the way for black metal, but they've never achieved the same, universal status. And yet, if anyone doubted **KREATOR** were headline-worthy beforehand, even after three previous visits to these grounds, tonight proves to be one of those galvanising, deliriously celebratory performances of which Bloodstock legends are made.

It helps that the production is stellar, but the hellish stage design with an inverted pentagram above, roving, hunt-you-down lights, banks of pyro and streamers cannoned into the air to hang like an amphibious alien invasion all feel like integral discharges of excess energy rather than spectacle-inducing add-ons.

As an opening track, *Violent Revolution* is a powerful statement, capturing the moment thrash came out of its 90s doldrums, rediscovered its footing and a more expansive, forward momentum too. Once its melody-lashed chug hits the most gristly of locked grooves, the sense of euphoria is tangible, frontman Mille Petrozza's gnashing, titular chant coursing through every nerve ending like an electric charge.

Mille Petrozza laps up the adoration

Like their fellow 80s pioneers, Kreator have never stood still, and for 90 minutes they career through 32 years of restless history that never feels anything less than utterly in-the-moment. Their array of flavours, tempos and time-stamped classics are all bound by an unwavering ability to make a lightning strike at your pleasure centres, whether you're a relative newcomer or battle-hardened-and-jacketed old-school thrasher. *Extreme Aggression*'s snarling, bristling primitivism, *Hail To The Hordes*' ascendent anthemics, and *Betrayer*'s relentless foraging around Metallica's cornered urgency – with Dani Filth joining on vocals – all leave the mightiest of imprints that are going to reverberate for years to come.

WORDS: JONATHAN SELZER

OH, AND THÏS HAPPENED

The bands that smashed Saturday to bits

It might be their debut show, but **BORSTAL** are anything but greenhorns with members coming together from Knuckledust, King Of Pigs, Dripback and Brujeria. A chunky hardcore punk workout soon gets things going, kicking Saturday off with an 'Oi!'. Having had a go at a big stage at Download Pilot, **CONJURER** already appear at home in front of a few thousand people. That they're ballsy enough to start with a new song again is impressive. That said new song sounds like Neurosis being fed face-first through a meat grinder is doubly so.

Well and truly waking the Sophie tent up are **VIDEO NASTIES**, Liverpool's finest purveyors of snarling, horror-inspired black'n'roll. Peeling off razor-sharp riffs as frontman Damian von Talbot barks out bloody hymns, they make for a gruesome start to the day.

On paper, **WARGASM** are exactly the kind of band that would cause online outrage as part of a Bloodstock announcement. Those voices of dissent are oddly silent during the band's set, though, particularly when the crowd starts chanting the electro-rockers' name back at them.

While it doesn't quite match the emotional jubilance of their career-defining Download Pilot set in June, **WHILE SHE SLEEPS** still put on a typically brilliant show on the main stage, Loz Taylor even beating off post-COVID fatigue to clamber up the production tower. Lad.

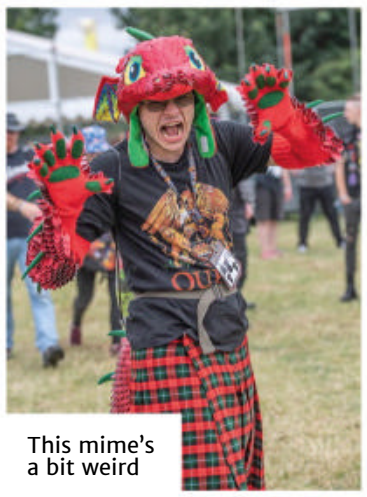
Despite noise from Sleeps' set spilling through the New Blood tent, **HAWXX** remain determined. The crowd even defend – however fruitlessly – the quartet's grand wall of hard rock grooves and beguiling, three-part vocals with humorous shushes aimed at Loz and co.

It's a sign of **PARADISE LOST**'s creative and critical health that Nick Holmes is clearly having more fun onstage than in years gone past. Playing their best-selling and pivotal album, *Draconian Times*, in full, their granite-edged gothicism is treated like a celebration by fans and band alike.

When **MOUNTAIN CALLER** bassist El Reeve poses the question: "We come to you with our offering of riffs, do you accept?", the crowd speedily nod their heads, before the band pummel out a series of underwear-darkening, Tool-inspired riffs. They may only be playing the Jagermeister Stage, but they already feel like Bloodstock veterans.

METAL FANCY DRESS

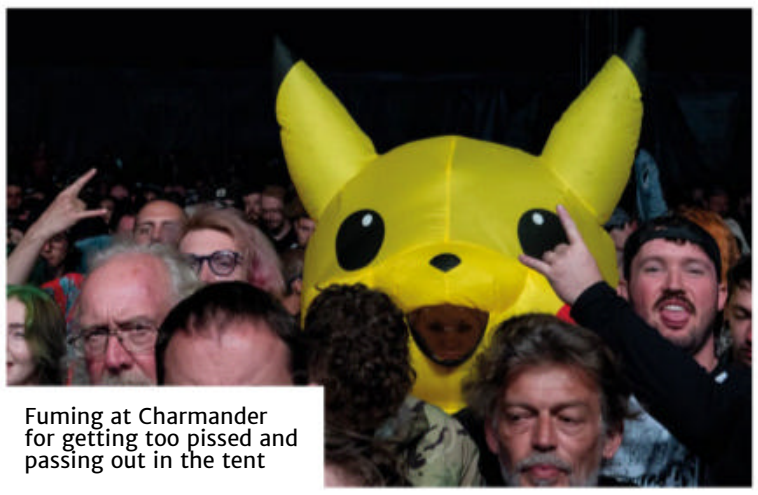
From Festival Jesus to Pikachu, you lot certainly didn't disappoint with the outfits this year



This mime's a bit weird

Your own... personal... wait for it... CHEESUS! Because of the cheese! And the Jesus!

Bananaman: fallen on hard times since the divorce



Fuming at Charmander for getting too pissed and passing out in the tent

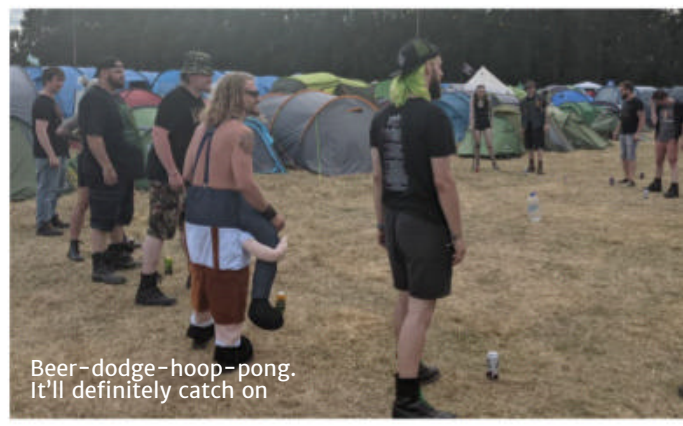
We smell an odd-couple sitcoooooom!

Alright, who forgot to book Cradle Of Filth a hotel?

Anyone seen our pet cow? We left him by the axe-throwing stal-oh shit....

BEER! BIN-JOUSTING! THOMAS THE TANK ENGINE?

Absolutely no alcohol was involved in the making of this photo



Beer-dodge-hoop-pong. It'll definitely catch on

Here's what went down on the campsites this year

Hammer pitches up in Ironwood camp – close enough to the parties, quiet enough for a decent sleep – late on Wednesday afternoon. As we take in the atmosphere of the first Bloodstock for two years, we quickly find proof in the main area of Midgard that nature is healing. "He's been drinking since one o'clock today!" explains Aidan from Bristol, motioning to his campmate, Nick. "Nine in the morning, actually!" comes a loud and inebriated response. You can't blame him, though; it's many people's first live music event since the pandemic shut everything down, and they're making up for lost time. The evening sees the air filled with the dull, satisfying thud of waste disposal units crashing into one another. *Hammer* grins – bin jousting is back.

We're less amused on Thursday, though: sure, the bread fight in Midgard is funny, but the group waking us up at stupid o'clock by playing the *Thomas The Tank Engine* theme on loop is not welcome. Lads, Punk Rock Factory played hours ago, go to bed…

"THE SATISFYING THUDS MEAN BIN JOUSTING IS BACK"

Friday sees us drop in on a game that seems to be a cross between beer pong, hoopla and dodgeball; we're not really sure how it works, but hey, it looks like fun!

Saturday is more eventful: firstly, we see a drunk guy being helped to this tent by friends, who are telling everyone to wish him goodnight. "Goodnight, Steve!" rings out around Midgard. A few hours later, we spy a small group explaining to their (also very inebriated) friend that he needs to hold up the central lighting pole in the campsite, or the entire area will be plunged into darkness; it's a bit mean, yes, but undoubtedly funny.

Sunday brings about the final round of jousting and drinking and, as two Scottish guys depart on Monday morning while their camp plays *I'm On My Way* by The Proclaimers, it's clear Bloodstock has been badly missed.

COSTUMES: TINA KORHONEN, KATJA OGRIN AND JADE GREENBROOKE. CAMPSITE: STEVE DEMPSEY. ELLIOT LEAVER.

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CAN I PLAY WITH MADNESS?

Bloodstock is the home of some of metal's daftest bands. We sent Reviews Editor Jonathan Selzer to experience them all, and try to retain his sanity

Is it a Robotron? Is it a Crabulon? No, it's Evil Scarecrow

If you're a vaguely sensible metalhead, the chances are you begrudgingly accept the existence of bands like Alestorm in the same manner as you would an annoyingly hyperactive cousin: hovering around the edges of your awareness, but one you're forced to encounter head-on during occasional family reunions. But however long you've managed to avoid the realms of jigging, swigging, dragons and rambunctious derring-do, the former power metal festival that is Bloodstock is where all your chickens come home to roost (there's always a chicken), along with a host of inflatable swords, rainbow-maned unicorns, an occasional blow-up doll and, if you're lucky, a pineapple.

Playing to a full Sophie tent of fans grinning ear to ear, **RAISED BY OWLS** are effectively on home turf as they howl through a hyperactive comedy-grind set. Feet firmly in the Anal Cunt camp, their songtitles and banter are often the main source of amusement, otherwise obscured by the band's penchant for plumbing the depths of hypersonic extremity in sharp bursts of sonic bedlam.

It's up to **HANOWAR** to next test your will to live, on the Hobgoblin New Blood Stage. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a Manowar "tribute/parody" band (telling overlap, that) with the added benefit of not actually being Manowar, they stride across that fine line between genuinely rousing spirit and wince-worthy, if muscular schmaltz. From the middle of the melee, the appearance of furry boots remains unconfirmed, but plastic swords are waved, party poppers are handed out and makeshift leopardskin is wrapped around un-buffed bandmembers as the likes of *Warriors Of The World* and *Heart Of Steel* are made slightly smaller, yet far more enjoyable by a modicum of self-awareness and a lack of overbearing narcissism.

THE INJESTER look like a Poundland Slipknot, decked out in prison stripes and linen clown and scarecrow masks, with frontman Ashe looking like the understandably abandoned lovechild of Papa Lazarou and Abbath. The

The Injester: holding out for a pierrot

Fellowship: more Riverdance than Rivendell

band's creepy-but-not-really shtick is too self-conscious to be in any way engaging – unless you're trying *really* hard to enjoy their gothicky attempt at a carnivalesque metal-go-round. One two-track EP to their name and the air of 'Why are we doing this again?' already hangs over them.

In **FELLOWSHIP**'s take on Middle Earth, the denizens of Rivendell are more Butlin's greeters than badass

"EVIL SCARECROW ARE THE PERFECT BAND TO HEADLINE THE SOPHIE TENT"

warriors. Bedecked in cape and green faux-leathers, frontman Matthew Corry's boyish charm and melodic warble get the crowd going - and rainbow unicorns heads raised above the crowd – but their bright-eyed, galloping, pageboy power metal is in a clearly-eve-of-first-battle vein, carrying all the sweep and drama of the *Neighbours* theme tune.

For some, **EVIL SCARECROW**'s 2019 field-filling main stage set remains a bottomless source of exasperation and bewilderment. This year they're signing off the festival headlining the Sophie Stage, and it turns out that given the circumstances, there's no more perfect band to do so. Their gimmickry isn't offset, but enhanced by the charm and humility embodied by frontman Dr. Hell and unnecessarily high-end musicianship, but beyond that, tonight they embody the sense of release Bloodstock has offered. From the mass dancing to *Robototron*, through to the introduction of the *A Gay And A NonGay* podcast hosts James Barr and Dan Hudson overseeing a wall of sexy dancing, to a final *Crabulon*, where the crowd's raised pincers could just as well be a universal sign for a feed-me hunger for communal experience, they turn outright silliness into strangely emotional, much-needed catharsis.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING: RICH HOBSON

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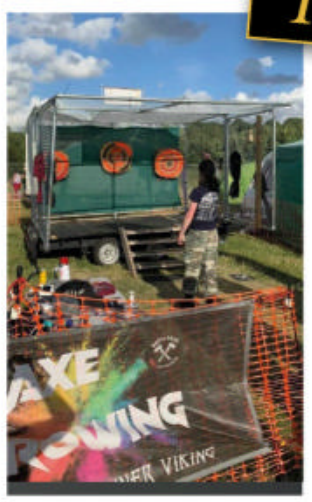
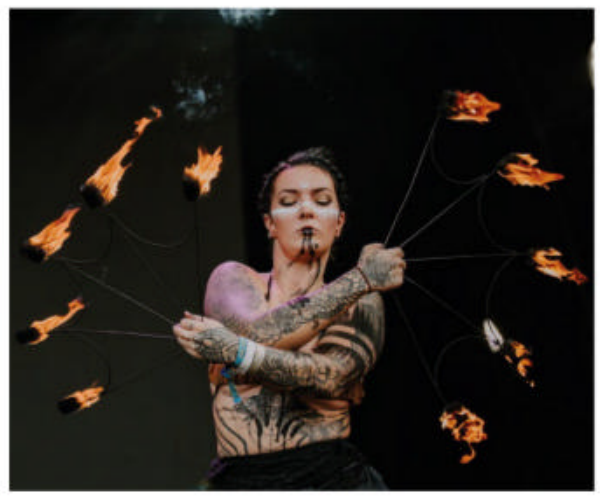
HAMMER

SUNDAY

Seidrblot: just what the doctor ordered for our hangovers





BLOODSTOCK GOES PAGAN

"I bet you've never seen someone chopping wood onstage before!" Bloodstock doesn't often take risks, or wild lateral leaps, but that only makes the rapt response to Sunday openers **SEIDRBLOT** all the more uplifting. It's not often that a pounding 4/4 beat turns out to be a good hangover prescription, but the seated, cowled three-piece are very much aligned to the Wardruna/Heilung axis of soul-salving pagan folk. The droning lyre, throat singing and the glacial traction of their music – flanked by fire-dancers – combine to mesmeric effect, even if the final track is basically Wardruna's *Fehu* only slightly retooled.

BRIAN. FUCKING. BLESSED.

"I never expected this! Bloody hell!" Neither did most of Bloodstock, judging by its elated response to *Flash Gordon* icon, official Living Legend and *Metal Hammer* Golden God winner, Brian Blessed, arriving onto the main stage early Sunday evening. He's here tonight to introduce fellow British institutions, Saxon, who hail from his homeland of South Yorkshire . "We're gonna beat COVID, we're gonna save the Earth!" he bellows, even throwing in a couple of "Gordon's Alive!"s for good measure. Finishing up by sparking the first – but certainly not last – Saxon chant of the day, Brian leaves to a hero's fanfare. What an absolute top fella!

Brian Blessed: fleeces alive

AXE-THROWING RULES

It wouldn't be Bloodstock without a ton of extracurricular shenanigans going on. From fire-breathing dancers, to tattoo sessions, to a gaming tent (we couldn't get near the PS5, sigh…), there are things all over the place to keep our attention. Best (and most metal) of all, though, surely has to be the axe-throwing stand, which has a constant stream of punters striding up to try their hand at going Full Viking. We finally cave on the Sunday and give it a go ourselves. We're pretty damn good, too (We forgot to take photos, so just take our word for it, yeah?)!

"WE'RE GONNA BEAT COVID AND SAVE THE EARTH!"

BRIAN BLESSED

…OH, AND THIS HAPPENED

The bands that closed out the weekend in style

Bloodstock isn't traditionally the home of existential dread, but **GRAVE LINES** pull you inexorably into their wormhole in the Sophie tent. The crawling, reeling, serpentine riffs are given added drama and frission by frontman Jake Harding, howling like he's hammering at the gates of psychosis. Sunday chill? No chance.

Anyone who longed for more Venom Prison after their set would surely approve of **THIS IS ENDLESS** on the New Blood Stage. The Londoners must have an allergy to frills, instead preferring to make music that sounds like death metal getting buggered in the shower by classic New York hardcore. It's exactly as wonderfully unpleasant as it sounds.

On the Jagermeister Stage, the steampunk-styled **SPECTRAL DARKWAVE** create a smog of death metal-infused industrial doom, their skull-rattling riffs and lethal growls casting a trance that enraptures all within its wake and creating a blackened void in the centre of the Bloodstock field.

Administering a helpful dose of "fucking heavy metal chaos" on the main stage, **ORANGE GOBLIN** come on like the grime, grease and pungent odour of that one beer too many we guzzled down last night. Oh, and the sun comes back out for pretty much the entirety of their set. Massive riffs + sunshine? A perfect festival set.

With the ethereal illustrations of their debut album, *Woodland Rites*, providing an enchanting backdrop, coupled with aching yowls, esoteric lyrics and stupefying Sabbathian riffs, **GREEN LUNG** are immediately magnetising. Highlights include the recently released *Reaper's Scythe* and towering anthem *Let The Devil In*. Heads are dutifully banged.

Making great use of a professional opera singer on backing vocals, **NECRONAUTICAL** delight a healthy crowd with their symphonic, blackened death metal over on the Sophie Lancaster Stage. Their sound isn't groundbreaking, but they're expert performers, and the tent laps it up.

Perhaps just a tad ploddier than they were a decade or two back, **SAXON** are NWOBHM legends nonetheless. Introduced by Brian Blessed, massive hits like *Denim and Leather*, *And The Bands Played On* and *747 (Strangers in the Night)* affirm just how triumphant they are in their decades-long quest to champion heavy metal.

SEIDRBLOT: JADE GREENBROOKE, KATJA OGRIN. AXE THROWING: MERLIN ALDERSLADE

JUDAS PRIEST

Judas Priest: epic. Just... epic

The Defenders Of The Faith take their rightful place as the kings of Bloodstock. Long live Priest!

Between Diamond Head, Napalm Death and Memoriam, Bloodstock 2021 has no shortage of bands from heavy metal's birthplace in the Black Country. But when all is said and done, no band (except maybe Black Sabbath) can claim to have had such an impact on heavy metal as a genre as **JUDAS PRIEST**. Taking to the stage with a sense of almost regal authority, Priest *know* this crowd is entirely theirs, and as such settle in for a two-hour offering of rarities and deep cuts that serves as a headlong plunge into their 52-year career.

Beginning with *One Shot At Glory*, played for the first time ever, Rob's opening vocal, *'Let me hear the battle cry'*, is actualised by 20,000 voices howling in pure delight. Even if they stuck to the hits, Priest would struggle to cover everything in a two-hour slot without omissions, so unsurprisingly most records only get a single cut before we move on to the next slab of heavy metal history. The twin guitar assault of Richie Faulkner and Andy Sneap proves a winning combination for capturing the metal god essence, while Scott Travis and Ian Hill maintain a rhythm that may as well be the beating heart of heavy metal itself.

And then, there's Rob Halford. Swinging between ear-piercing howls for *Exciter* and *Painkiller* or spitting on the more percussive rock'n'roll stomps of *Rocka Rolla* and *Victim Of Changes*, Rob is an unstoppable force, even diving headlong into death metal barks at one point just to illustrate his sheer range. By the time the band drop the killing blows of *Breaking The Law* and *Living After Midnight*, complete with long-time guitarist Glenn Tipton, there's no denying just how special this set feels, Bloodstock not so much a homecoming as a reclamation of a throne nobody would dare dispute. Hail to the kings. Hail to Bloodstock.

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

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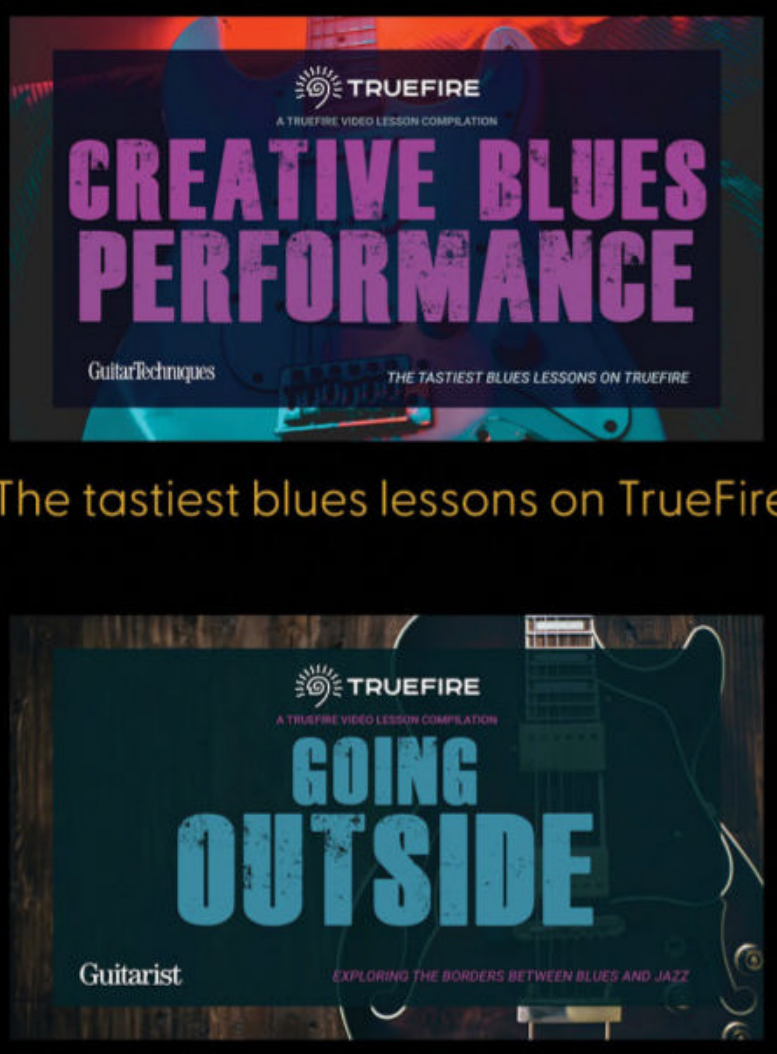

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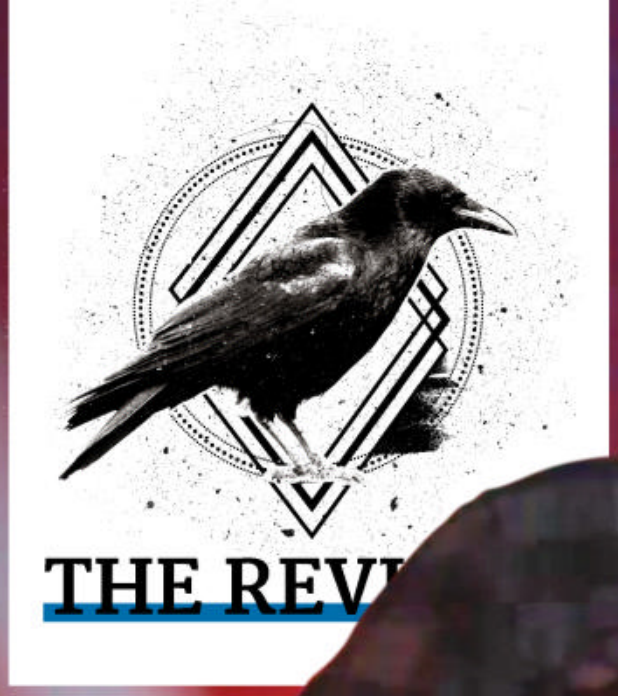

100
KILLSWITCH ENGAGE
Massachusetts' metalcore veterans go back to their roots

86
SPIRITBOX
The most eagerly anticipated debut in years pays back the faith

86 ALBUM REVIEWS
88 TRIVIUM
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103 PRIMORDIAL
105 VOICES

EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER

Spiritbox have just released the most self-azured debut album in years

SPIRITBOX

Eternal Blue

RISE

Vancouver Island's emotionally charged scene-stealers repay the faith

EVERY GREAT BAND has their tipping point. For post-metalcore trio Spiritbox, it was the release of their 2020 single, *Holy Roller.* Before that, the Canadians were a promising new noise and had gathered a cult following with their self-titled 2017 EP and subsequent run of excellent singles. But afterwards, and millions of streams later, the band were the name on the lips of heavy music fans and tastemakers across the internet. As a result, it's difficult to remember a debut record in recent years that's landed with as much hype and anticipation as *Eternal Blue*.

Vocalist Courtney LaPlante and guitarist Michael Stringer broke up their last band, metalcore mutineers iwrestledabearonce, to form an outlet that would allow them the creative fluidity they craved. *Eternal Blue* is driven by that steadfast refusal to submit to genre boundaries, combining brutal, progressive metal with hooks and huge, ethereal swathes of melody to create lush and intricate soundscapes. Of course, Spiritbox aren't the first band to exploit the sweet spot between beauty and brutality, but these songs feel fresh, bolstered by emotional heft that hits right in the guts.

Opener *Sun Killer* sets the tone. Courtney's haunting vocal floats amid industrial-tinged beats and atmospheric electronics before exploding into a monstrous Tesseract-esque pile-on. *Hurt You* veers between a chorus Holding Absence would bellow from the rooftops and a mid-section where Courtney cements herself as one of the best vocalists in our scene today, pulling a vocal volte-face so pulverising, it leaves your knees weak.

"SPIRITBOX'S TRUE POWER IS THEIR ABILITY TO RESONATE EMOTIONALLY"

PRESSS/TRAVIS SHINN

That push and pull is at the core of the record, ensuring it never falls into repose. A highlight comes early as industrial glitches usher in huge, juddering tech grooves on *Yellowjacket*, before Architects' Sam Carter turns up to strike euphoric gold on the chorus. The aforementioned metalcore banger, *Holy Roller* – the song that punted the band up into the big leagues – still packs a punch. But when nestled between the Code Orange-isms of *Silk In The Strings* and the devastatingly gorgeous album title track, its straight-up metalcore anthemia almost (*almost*) comes off as one-note.

Spiritbox's true power is their ability to resonate emotionally. That vulnerability is laid bare in the mellow flow of *The Summit*, and on *Secret Garden* and *Circle With Me*, both of which burst into cacophonous walls of sound. They're so lush and dense, they're almost holographic in their effect, exploding in a shock of vivid purples, reds and greens. But if there's one song that sums up what Spiritbox are all about, it's towering closer *Constance* – a beautiful mediation on the cruelty of dementia that has spawned its own tearful reaction series on Youtube. As waves of sound compress and crash and deafening guitars lead into the track's serene end, fear, frustration and longing spill and bleed into each other, leaving behind an impression that will continue to burn for a long time to come. *Eternal Blue* is a staggeringly brilliant record that resoundingly delivers on the hype.

FOR FANS OF: **Deftones, Tool, Make Them Suffer**

DANNII LEIVERS

BLOOD RED THRONE
Imperial Congregation
NUCLEAR BLAST

Norway's death metal overlords find triumph in turbulence

Blood Red Throne's 10th album sees the Nordic death metallers draw inspiration from these turbulent times. An examination of the self-righteous nature of humanity and our incessant need to destroy ourselves, *Imperial Congregation* is one of the angriest albums they have ever made. After you get past the meat'n'potatoes first half, the five-piece impress with a fistful of pit-ready, 90s death-inspired stompers. Standouts include *Consumed Illusion*, which throws in some Dimebag-esque fret wizardry, and the bludgeoning *We All Bleed*, which boasts a Herculean performance from tub-thumper Freddy Bolsø.

FOR FANS OF: **Dying Fetus, Cannibal Corpse, Aborted**

EDWIN McFEE

THE BODY AND BIG | BRAVE
Leaving None But Small Birds
THRILL JOCKEY

Leftfield heavy hitters form an apocalyptic-folk union

Their cultish rep might be for intimidating shards of eviscerating noise, but here The Body and Big | Brave explore a shared love of deep-fried acid folk and raw country blues. With heavily droning guitars and eddying violins they rekindle the pathos inherent in traditional tunes such as *Black Is The Colour* and *Babes In The Woods*. Robin Wattie affords the delightful mantra of *Blackest Crow* with the defiance and impassioned theatricality of Fairport Convention's Sandy Denny. Elsewhere, bucolic strums and shruti box hum are harnessed to belligerent percussion, sounding like a pre-industrial farm flexing its newly mechanised muscle. Murder ballad *Pretty Polly* (recast as *Polly Gosford*) is revamped as a gorgeously maniacal whiplash-laden revenge tale.

FOR FANS OF: **Swans, Earth, The Geraldine Fibbers**

SPENCER GRADY

BOKASSA
Molotov Rocktail
NAPALM

Norwegian stoner punks uncover an explosive formula

Bokassa's time in stadiums clearly agreed with them. Their combination of chunky stoner riffs, crowd-baiting choruses and hardcore punk was always a winning recipe for good-times rock'n'roll, but *Molotov Rocktail* lights the mix and uses it to blow the roof off. Trading in their stoner punk past, Bokassa tackle album number three with measured, punchy riffs that cannonball right into the brain. Every song boasts a monumental chorus: instant hits of pure dopamine that beg to be heard on repeat. With such eminent replayability, *Molotov Rocktail* threatens to burst the bubble separating 'classic-sounding' records and straight-up classics, easily delivering the most fun stoner record since Monster Magnet's *Powertrip* in the process.

FOR FANS OF: **Red Fang, Massive Wagons, Kvelertak**

RICH HOBSON

Trivium: still adding to their trove of treasures

TRIVIUM

In The Court Of The Dragon

ROADRUNNER

Metal's great hopes continue to pole-vault our wildest expectations

HOW LONG DOES a 'return to form' have to last until it's just 'form'? You all know Trivium's story at this point: the highs of instant classic *Ascendancy*, the troughs of *The Crusade* and *Vengeance Falls* and the stunning redemption of 2017's *The Sin And The Sentence* and last year's *What The Dead Men Say*. Weirdly, despite all of this contextual weight, when approaching *In The Court Of The Dragon* you just never really ever felt in any doubt that Trivium 2021 would or could let you down. The band have just been so good, so reliable, in the last five years that you really shouldn't be surprised to hear that (spoiler alert) this album is another exceptional effort.

The title track, ushered in after *X*'s 90-second intro, sets the tone perfectly. It's an awe-inspiringly brilliant modern metal song, powered by dizzying drumming from Alex Bent, riffs Dimebag Darrell would have been proud of and a memorable vocal performance from Matt Heafy that swerves from full fist-swinging rage into a bombastic chest-swelling croon. *Like A Sword Over Damocles* follows, and is, similarly, everything you'd want from a metal band in 2021. Whether you're a fan of Kreator, Killswitch Engage or Kvelertak it's got a flavour for you.

The band have done radio-friendly material in the past, with varied results, but the anthemic and soaring *Feast Of Fire* might just be the very finest example of it they've ever produced. Yes, better than *Dying In Your Arms* or *Until The World Goes Cold* – it's that good. By track four any concerns you may have had haven't just been chucked in the bin, they've already been picked up by the dump truck and are now deep underground in some landfill plot in the middle of nowhere.

What's great about Trivium in 2021 is that the flights of fancy they took without quite nailing in the past have now given them a scope beyond their peers. They've currently never sounded so comfortable with their identity, but they've also experimented enough as musicians over the years to give real depth and wide dynamics to their records. Matt's smoky vocals on *The Shadow Of The Abattoir* shows the superb progression he's made as a singer; Alex's opening drum pattern at the start of *Fall Into Your Hands* is proof that he's the drummer Trivium have always craved; and the cheeky little nods to both sleaze rock and black metal on *From Dawn To Decadence* exhibit a true love of every facet of heavy fucking metal.

Surely it's time to change the narrative now? Trivium aren't 'back', this isn't a 'return to form'; it's what they've been doing for more than half a decade and it's hard to see exactly who can compete with them right now. In terms of a band playing contemporary, modern heavy metal, Trivium have been the best for some time. They still are, and *In The Court Of The Dragon* is a fucking awesome heavy metal album. Was it ever in doubt?

"IT'S HARD TO SEE WHO CAN COMPETE WITH TRIVIUM RIGHT NOW"

FOR FANS OF: Machine Head, Metallica, Gojira

STEPHEN HILL

ALL PRESS

CARNIFEX
Graveside Confessions
NUCLEAR BLAST

San Diego's deathcore goblins outstay their welcome

Nobody needs an hour-long Carnifex album. This is their eighth in 15 years and none of the seven preceding it have even touched the 40-minute mark. Not that they've ever needed to, mind. Their sound's far from complicated: pedal-to-the-metal deathcore endowed with blackened tremolo picking and church organs. As a result, *Graveside Confessions* exhausts its bag of tricks by the midway interlude, *January Nights*. At that point, we've still got eight songs left, three of which are re-recordings of pre-existing material. If this is Carnifex attempting to venture outside their wheelhouse, it's backfired; by simply penning more of the same in a greater quantity, all they've demonstrated is how myopic their aspirations are.

FOR FANS OF: A Night In The Abyss, Thy Art Is Murder, Chelsea Grin

MATT MILLS

CLOSET DISCO QUEEN & THE FLYING RACLETTES
Omelette Du Fromage
HUMMUS

Coilguns members end up with egg on their faces

Forming a joke band with a joke name isn't the best way of ensuring people take you seriously, and what's on the menu here is unlikely to win many new bookings. *Omelette Du Fromage* sees the Closet Disco Queen duo joined by a(nother) member of Coilguns and an accomplished jazz musician. But expanded line-up or not, they're still stuck midway down a long queue of competent noodlers trying to unite the realms of Fugazi, Don Caballero and Earthless. Scuttly, angular sequences jitter wildly before being elbowed aside by thumping hard rock primitivism, but it's these latter elements that actually let things down. Soggy, undercooked riffing renders *Omelette Du Fromage* bland and rather forgettable, the band serving up empty calories rather than the hearty, stick-to-yer-ribs dish we were craving.

FOR FANS OF: Keelhaul, Pneu, The Skull Defekts

ALEX DELLER

COGNIZANCE
Upheaval
PROSTHETIC

More notes and noteworthy moments from Yorkshire techsters

After taking seven years to release debut *Malignant Dominion*, Cognizance's second effort comes after a mere two-year turnaround, and is a more incisive, muscular affair than its predecessor. The addition of second guitarist Apostolis Karydis has certainly beefed up the Leeds mob's sound, with more textures added to the atmospheric *Decaying Gods*. While the same balance of bewildering tech death metal and intricate melodies form the backbone, there are more moments that peer through the blizzard of notes. The classic groove and histrionics of *Forbidden Alchemy* summon the spirit of Chuck Schuldiner, the dense *Drifting (R)evolution* is capped by memorable twin leads, and the propulsive *Aeon Sickness* sees drummer David Diepold displaying how he's earned a spot behind Obscura's drum kit.

FOR FANS OF: Necrophagist, Death, Allegaeon

ADAM REES

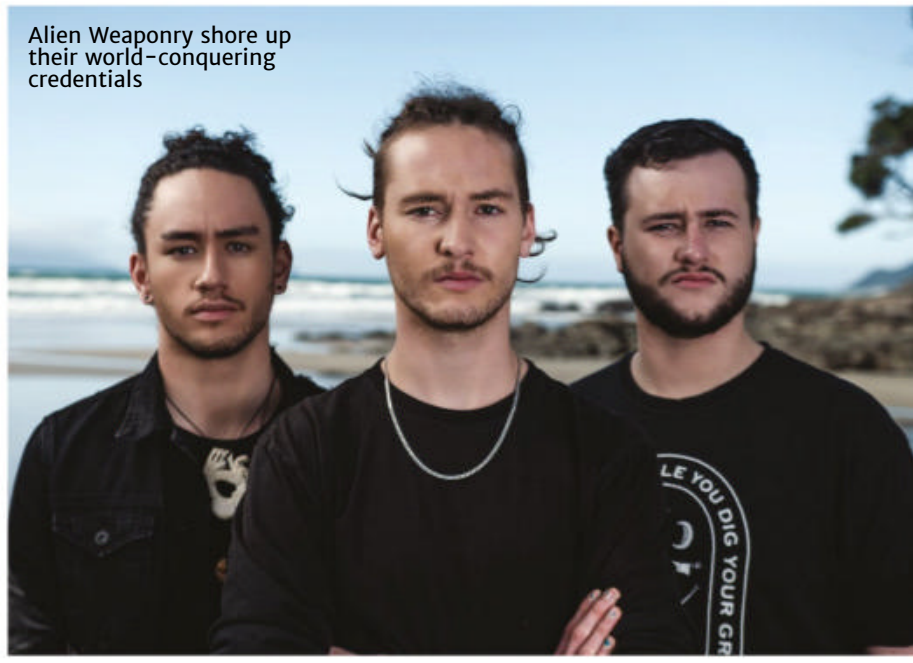
CRIMINAL
Sacrificio
METAL BLADE

Chilean death/thrash legends channel unrest and outrage

While writing their latest album, thrash-spiced death metal legends Criminal witnessed first-hand countless protests against corruption, inequality and more. Their Chilean homeland went through a period of anger and upheaval that resulted in thousands of arrests and dozens of fatalities. That feeling of outrage moved from the streets and into their studio, resulting in a record that rages against the machine with the best of them. Marking the first time they've recorded in Chile since the 90s, *Sacrificio* sees them embrace their roots (bloody roots) and the band's leader and sole original member Anton Reisenegger puts in a vintage vocal performance throughout. Employing Latin American rhythms to complement their lacerating riffs on *Age Of Distrust* and *Hunter And The Prey*, album number nine is a hook-laden tour de force, not least on *Zealots* and *Zona De Sacrificio*. Criminal have never sounded more arresting than they do here.

FOR FANS OF: Sepultura, Kreator, Brujeria

EDWIN McFEE


Alien Weaponry shore up their world-conquering credentials

ALIEN WEAPONRY
Tangaroa
NAPALM

New Zealand's world-striding metallers deepen their roots

IN THE 18 months that followed the release of debut album *Tū*, New Zealand's Alien Weaponry became arguably the hottest new metal band on the planet. Infusing their Māori roots with huge grooves and hooks was original and inspired – made even more impressive when everyone found out the members had an average age of 18 – and, when they took their live show across the world, people discovered they were really bloody good at that as well. Anticipation, therefore, is understandably high for their sophomore release, but after such a meteoric rise and a recent line-up change, it's understandable to worry whether the young trio have managed to take everything in their stride

Thankfully, *Tangaroa* is the natural successor to *Tū*. It's a more mature release that sees Alien Weaponry both consolidate their sound and progress as an outfit. The factors that made them so beloved are still there. The album is stuffed with riffs and stories about their ancestors sung in their native Māori tongue, such as opening number *Tītokowaru*, but there's more in terms of their personal lives and more recent, cultural history delivered with a boat-load of spite and anger. *Ahi Kā* speaks out about the colonisation of New Zealand by Britain, for example, whilst *Crooked Monsters* rages against abusers that escape justice.

Outgoing member Ethan Trembath contributes vocals on the venomous *Dad* – a bile-filled outburst against an absent parent. His successor, Tūranga Morgan-Edmonds, has taken to his role as bassist well, even contributing a guitar solo on the sprawling *Unforgiven*. As for the De Jong brothers – drummer Henry and guitarist/vocalist Lewis – they continue to be the beating heart that drives the band forward in every other aspect. With *Tangaroa*, they prove they're not a flash in the pan; Alien Weaponry have come of age.

FOR FANS OF: Sepultura, Machine Head, Gojira

ELLIOT LEAVER

Asking Alexandria are on model behaviour

ASKING ALEXANDRIA

See What's On The Inside

BETTER NOISE MUSIC

Metalcore's one-time upstarts deepen their hard rock bond

LEAVING THE SECURITY of label Sumerian for the first time in their 12-year career seemed to spell uncertainty for the future of Asking Alexandria, especially considering their sound has changed almost beyond recognition since the *Stand Up And Scream* days. However, the fact that their seventh album comes to Better Noise only a year after the last quells all concerns that these guys are by any means winding up to a close. Where 2017's self-titled album stepped out of the metalcore shadows and into the hard rock unknown, then *Like A House On Fire* settled into their new sensibilities, this latest venture bathes in the glow of a genre that feels far more comfortable than their heavier roots.

The band's most collaborative effort in a decade, produced while locked away together in a house in Tennessee, pays homage to their classic rock inspirations with AA's inimitable stamp slapped upon it, mixing compelling anthems with deeply personal reflective odes, sometimes simultaneously. Even while *Alone Again* exudes contagious hard rock, each note is laced with the poignancy that later bursts through *Find Myself* and *You've Made It This Far.*

For those still seeking a glimmer of nostalgia, the classic Asking Alexandria sound cleverly bubbles away under the surface and guides proceedings throughout. *Faded Out* and *If I Could Erase It* expose undertones of early AA's melodic carnage, closing the album on a dual threat that juggles the best of both worlds. *Fame* bleeds their trademark sass-laden *Not The American Average* vibe, blending in an addictive Led Zeppelin-esque riff that carries into *The Grey*'s beautifully unpredictable curtain call. This is the outrageously infectious sound of a band revelling in their influences and the creativity they inspire.

FOR FANS OF: **Avenged Sevenfold, Escape The Fate, Set It Off**

ALI COOPER

THE DEATH SET

How To Tune A Parrot

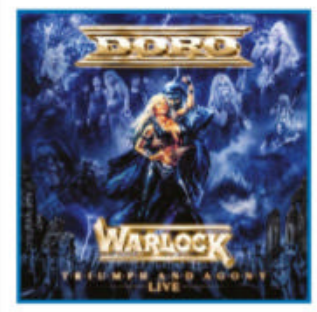
THIS CHARMING MAN

Brooklyn electro-punks recharge after a decade-long absence

In the 10 years since The Death Set released *Michel Poiccard*, the electro-punk scene has exploded. Returning to the subgenre they helped mould, this noisy duo waste no time in reclaiming their territory with some of the most unhinged and energetic punk around. *I'm Sick With It* illustrates the band's ability to confound and confuse with their genre-straddling auditory acrobatics. They shine on *Best Kept Mess*, featuring H09909 – a collaboration that bridges the gap between the 2011 and today. It's not always the most intelligent or the most thoughtful music, but it's a lot of fun, and, in 2021, that's exactly what we need.

FOR FANS OF: **Black Flag, DZ Deathrays, Beastie Boys**

ROSIE ESTHER SOLOMON



DORO

Warlock - Triumph And Agony Live

RARE DIAMONDS

Germany's metal queen returns to her transitional motherlode

Warlock's fourth and final LP (their fifth ended up as Doro's solo debut due to legal issues), *Triumph & Agony* flirted with a more polished, poppy edge in 1987. Although the colossal scream-along hooks in crucial fist-raisers like *All We Are*, *I Rule The Ruins* and *East Meets West* are as infectious and finely wrought as ever, these artfully re-sequenced live versions from Sweden Rock 2017 gain a walloping heft, weight and pace. Even the swooning ballad *Für Immer* sounds mightily doom-laden. Doro's band includes the original album's guitarist Tommy Bolan, but the compelling revelation, as ever, is our heroine's ageless and unique voice, still brimming with all the hunger, emotion and wild energy of the 80s.

FOR FANS OF: **Judas Priest, Motörhead, Accept**

CHRIS CHANTLER

DROTT

Orcus

BY NORSE

Enslaved and Ulver members go all in on the incense

Predicting what Enslaved guitarist Arve Isdal and Ulver collaborator Ivar Thormodsæter might concoct if they teamed up with cellist Matias Monsen is a mug's game, so it's no real surprise that Drott's debut album is a strange and scattered thing. Instrumental bar the occasional indecipherable croon or grumble, *Orcus* offers a series of loosely connected vignettes that lean hardest on prog, ambience and krautrock. *Katabasis* edges towards heaviness despite being smothered in squelchy wibbles, while *Psychopomp* is as gloomy and ominous as its name implies. The Eastern influences of *By The Lunar Lake* and the borderline New Age vibes of *Grey Gull* could be a hard sell for metalheads unwilling to accessorise their battle-jackets with tie-dyed kerchiefs or healing crystals.

FOR FANS OF: **Ulver, Brian Eno, Popol Vuh**

ALEX DELLER

PRESS

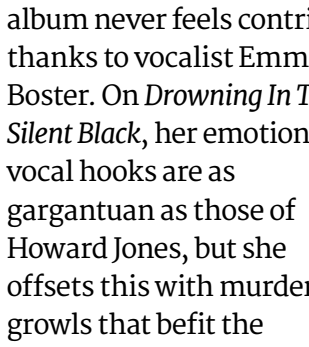
DYING WISH
Fragments Of A Bitter Memory
SHARPTONE

Metalcore debutants cover all the bases and hit a home run

Dying Wish's debut album recalls early 00s metalcore at its most honest and melodious. Opener *Cowards Feed, Cowards Bleed* embodies Bleeding Through's balance of antagonism and pain, while *Innate Thirst* adopts the Gothenburg riffs that were re-popularised by early Killswitch Engage. Yet the album never feels contrived thanks to vocalist Emma Boster. On *Drowning In The Silent Black*, her emotional vocal hooks are as gargantuan as those of Howard Jones, but she offsets this with murderous growls that befit the record's diabolically intense lyrical content. *Fragments...*' best quality is that, despite being a whirlwind of passion, and a political fight for racial, social and environmental revolution, it's still an electrifying, fun metal rager.

FOR FANS OF: Killswitch Engage, Bloodbather, Knocked Loose

PARIS FAWCETT



ENSLAVED
Caravans To The Outer Worlds
NUCLEAR BLAST

Norwegian extreme metal expansionists embark for the stars

In the past year Enslaved have put out four full-length live releases covering the immense sonic diversity that has characterised their three-decade career. But Enslaved's sheer creative fecundity ensures that *Caravans To The Outer Worlds* still manages to strive for new sonic shores in its 18-minute run-time. Split between two 'full' songs and two instrumental interludes, the EP utilises Enslaved's prog inclinations to indulge some more cosmic soundscapes than found in their full studio releases. The results are intriguing but do feel somewhat dispensable when cut away from the band's main canon. Nonetheless, the title-track alone should make this a worthy listen for any longterm fan, tapping into some of the most apoplectic black metal Enslaved have indulged in this side of the millennium.

FOR FANS OF: Borknagar, Devin Townsend, Ihsahn

RICH HOBSON

FARER
Monad
TARTARUS

Depressive blackened doom trio lurch into an enthralling unknown

Originally released on CD and cassette last year, Dutch trio Farer's debut finally gets a vinyl release. Comprised of two bass players and a drummer, they offer an hour of low-end, high-concept negativity across four movements, making for a bleak but driven listen. *Phanes* crackles to life in dissonant static, remaining amorphous until the onset of intertwining basslines and crashing drums prove starkly powerful against screeching vocal incoherence and sorrowful wails. *Asulon* has a spine of stabbing bass as drums scatter and tumble, the sound of someone's world falling apart. *Moros* eventually explodes in erratic energy – an uplifting surge before the abject and leaden *Elpis*. Likely making for a mesmeric live show, *Monad* artfully succeeds in capturing the bleak mindset of those who know what it is to feel truly lost.

FOR FANS OF: Primitive Man, Vile Creature, Amenra

TOM O'BOYLE

FORGETTING THE MEMORIES
Vemod
LONG BRANCH

Swedish metalcore brutalists got locked in their introspection

Sharpening its metalcore teeth, *Vemod* is the darker big brother to Forgetting The Memories' debut, *Monophobia*. It's five years older and five times more pissed with the world and the people inhabiting it. 'Vemod' is the Swedish term for melancholy, and it accurately describes the emotion eking through *A Voice In The Static* and *Mask Ov Lies*. This battering show of force showcases their potential through the towering Hollywood epic of *From Soot* and *Trauma*'s instrumental onslaught. However, despite its brutal inclinations and production values, the vocal performances often feel emotionally disconnected from their intense lyrical subjects, reaching a shade too far into their souls for tracks in excess of five minutes that sometimes labour their point. Forgetting The Memories have admirably personal intentions, but perhaps set their own sights a little too high.

FOR FANS OF: Killswitch Engage, Parkway Drive, August Burns Red

ALI COOPER

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

BLODET
Vision
CHURCH ROAD

As well as finding a singer, Swedish experimentalists Blodet have discovered that less is more. *Vision* is epic, ambitious and graceful – a decluttered departure from their debut that deftly explores post-rock, post-hardcore and post-metal.

ALEX DELLER

CRISIX
The Pizza EP
LISTENABLE

Nuclear war aside, thrash's favourite subject matter is partying. Spain's premier speed merchants' homage to the ultimate party food – and *Jurassic Park* – is as juvenile as it sounds, but done with the necessary precision and charm.

ADAM REES

DOMINICIDE
The Architecture Of Oppression
SELF RELEASED

Now back and better than ever after a line-up change, these Glaswegians sound unstoppable. Featuring ferocious tech, death and thrash-flavoured tracks, this four-track EP is an explosive listen.

EDWIN McFEE

INSOMNIUM
Argent Moon
CENTURY MEDIA

From the bleak darkness of quarantine misery, these Finnish melodic death metallers have swapped the acerbic for a taste of atmosphere, their softer side unveiled via this EP's four tracks of bewitching Northern melancholia.

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

RITUALS
Awake
SELF-RELEASED

Newcastle heavies Rituals make a bold entrance with their diverse debut EP, trying their hands at a selection of metal tropes, including haunting melodics, menace-laden metalcore dual vocals and relentless industrial chaos.

ALI COOPER

VOW
Icarian
SURVIVING SOUNDS

Icarian's windswept guitars, forlorn vocals and rolling rhythms are usually associated with post-metal. Thankfully Vow remember the metal part of the equation with blastbeats and doom-laden riffing balancing the ambience.

JOSEPH STANNARD

Carcass: in a class of one

CARCASS
Torn Arteries
NUCLEAR BLAST

Death metal legends execute another bold and bloody comeback

LONG-AWAITED COMEBACKS ARE notoriously tricky to pull off with dignity, but Carcass made it look easy. When the legendary Brits released *Surgical Steel* in 2013, 17 years after they last released an album, the response was almost universally ecstatic. Not just a giant, choking dose of new Carcass music, it showcased a fiendishly clever hybrid of everything that fans loved about the band: from the all-out, gore-drenched fury of the early years, to the more sophisticated songwriting and melodic brilliance of *Necroticism* and *Heartwork*. It was, in essence, Total Carcass, and *Torn Arteries* repeats the trick, with even more suppurating swagger and deathly swing.

Veteran status be damned, Carcass sound thoroughly vital and vivacious here. With the band's current line-up now well-oiled through extensive touring, these songs offer a wonderfully organic and human antidote to the legions of Pro-Tooled conformity. Theirs is a proudly old-school approach, and yet from the ripping riff-splurge of the opening title track to the cudgelling pomp of *The Scythe's Remorseless Swing*, Carcass always sound utterly contemporary too. Both *Under The Scalpel Blade* and *Kelly's Meat Emporium* are explosive, succinct and considerably more sonically grisly than anything on *Surgical Steel*: shades of *Reek Of Putrefaction*-era goregrind oozing from bullet-holes in an otherwise gleaming, classic metal chassis. By contrast, *Flesh Ripping Sonic Torment Limited* is simply the most epic and progressive thing Carcass have ever recorded; nearly 10 minutes in length and blessed with an obscene number of magnificent Bill Steer riffs, it confirms that the band are instinctively disinterested in rehashing past glories, and are still overburdened with brilliant, eccentric ideas. Meanwhile, Jeff Walker's ageless rasp and unerringly perverse and sardonic lyrics are as unique as ever. Once again, this is Total Carcass. No one does it better. In fact, no one else does it.

FOR FANS OF: **At The Gates, Arch Enemy, Exhumed**

DOM LAWSON

FOUR STROKE BARON
Classics
PROSTHETIC

Nevada's riff-laden mavericks hit the jackpot with added Dev

It takes testicular fortitude to give your second album a title like *Classics*, but Four Stroke Baron have a point. Building on the mercurial brilliance of 2018's *Planet Silver Screen*, the Nevada trio's sound has mutated into something truly extra-ordinary. An audacious display of originality and ingenuity, songs like the sinewy, simmering *Friday Knight* and opening colossus *Radium* are both futuristic and progressive, *and* rooted in some ghostly, post-punk past. Mixed by Devin Townsend, and sonically dazzling in ways that only he could deliver, *Classics* is dense with untamed electronics and syrupy ambience, but also rich with exhilarating songs that never cease in their quest to thrill and surprise. This is amazing. Four Stroke Baron should be fucking huge.

FOR FANS OF: **Unto Others, Voyager, Devin Townsend**

DOM LAWSON

FULL OF HELL
Garden Of Burning Apparitions
RELAPSE

East coast Grind dissidents smash the system with extra venom

Fearless, ferocious and often genuinely terrifying, Full Of Hell have become one of the most vital bands on the planet. The band's fourth full-length lasts a mere 21 minutes, and yet it contains extreme multitudes. Constructed around an amorphous framework of insanely vicious grindcore, powerviolence and death metal, the quartet's enlightened approach to destruction is more vivid than ever on the short, savage likes of *Guided Blight* and the excoriating *Industrial Messiah Complex*. More experimental mayhem like *Derelict Satellite* and *Celestial Hierarch* confirms FOH's status as one of heavy music's most lethally subversive bands. *Garden...* bristles with righteous contempt for the idiotic world around us.

FOR FANS OF: **Lightning Bolt, Napalm Death, Merzbow**

DOM LAWSON

GOD DAMN
Raw Coward
ONE LITTLE INDEPENDENT

Pure rock fury on Wolverhampton noisemongers' gnarliest outing

On their fourth album, God Damn have taken their greasy garage rock sound to its heaviest incarnation yet, edging ever closer to more metallic, sludgier pastures. They still dish out brash, anthemic bangers like the tuneful title track and *Drop Me Off Where They Clean The Dead Up* – a track that straddles balls-out rock bravado and gleeful chaos reminiscent of The Icarus Line's early work. But they also tackle denser, riffier fare on the Ministry-esque *Little Dead Souls Pt.2* or the sardonic *Shit Guitar*, in which vocalist Thom Edward howls *'I love my shit guitar!'* atop a riff so pounding it'd give King Buzzo a headache.

FOR FANS OF: **Melvins, Pissed Jeans, Nirvana**

KEZ WHELAN

PRESS/HANNAH VERBEUREN

GRACEFUL
Demiurgia
VLAD PRODUCTIONS

Never mind the Pollocks, it's Gallic abstract rock brilliance

A psychedelic mélange of experimental rock, eclectic effects, crazy changes of pace and vocals that dance between snarling, serene and abrasive, Graceful's second album is nothing if not theatrical. Mastered by Cult Of Luna's Magnus Lindberg, *Demiurgia* is rooted in the same truth as the debut, but is even less accessible. *Psylle* begins breathily and grows more obscure and aggressive; *I Hope You Run Fast* starts with a frenzied barrage of tortured screams and taunting whispers before dipping into near stillness; *Dawn* is warm and melodic; and *Scrapes* is just brilliantly bonkers. The angriest tracks are most engaging, but the album is smartly written to allow for the calm and chaos to ebb and flow. Impossible to pin down, this lot continue to approach music like abstract art, and the result is certainly entertaining.

FOR FANS OF: Muse, QOTSA, Fantômas

NIK YOUNG

GROZA
The Redemptive End
AOP

Mgła-inspired black metallers start to cast their own shadows

This German black metal 'collective' evolved from founding vocalist/guitarist P.G.'s one-man project to a four-piece by the time of their 2018 debut, *Unified, In Void*, a modern BM album bursting with pacy melodic leads over relentless blasts. *The Redemptive End* builds on its spirited predecessor by adding nuance – an attempt perhaps to distance themselves from the Mgła comparisons that abounded upon their inception, P.G. making no bones in interviews of how much he was inspired by them. More thought is given to atmosphere and texture, the grandiose slow burn of *Sunken In Styx – Pt. I: Submersion*, inevitably exploding in *Pt. II: Descent*. The record ups the epic the deeper you go, offering a rambunctious journey through darkness, with a few shafts of light. Groza succeed in elevating their songcraft but are yet to break the mould.

FOR FANS OF: Uada, Gaera, Auðn

TOM O'BOYLE

ILLT
Urhat
INDIE RECORDINGS

Cinematic extreme metal with a cast of high-end cameos

Not to be confused with the Russian black metallers, this Illt hail from Norway and the fertile musical imagination of award-winning film composer Roy Westad. When he's not plunking at percussion or blowing into wind instruments as the background score to actors working out issues, extracting laughs and murdering each other, Westad is an accomplished guitarist and extreme metal enthusiast. With the help of members of Nile, Soilwork, Megadeth and Chrome Division, Illt deliver a dense and layered cross-section of thrash, melodic death and black metal with blazing solos and the occasional, highly entertaining break that summons ol' fashioned rock'n'roll. Or in the case of *Every Tree A Gallow*, bluesy sequences that touch upon Eyehategod's Southern-fried misery warped by a playful brightness that unsurprisingly retains a cinematic scope and prodigious virtuosity.

FOR FANS OF: Strapping Young Lad, Rivers Of Nihil, Dissection

CONNIE GORDON

IN THE COMPANY OF SERPENTS
Lux
PETRICHOR

Monumental majesty from the home of Americana-infused metal

In The Company Of Serpents' 10-year arc has seen the band shift from grim, doom-dealing disciples of Electric Wizard to inventive practitioners of the 'Denver Sound' – the marauding style that synthesises various genres of extreme metal with Americana. ITCOS's first album as a trio showcases a clutch of darkly impassioned epics that pair the teeth-shattering force of doom with the gothic grandiosity of the Old West (*The Chasm At The Mouth Of The All*, *Prima Materia*). Filled with bottom-end fuzz and a pervading sense of danger, *Archonic Manipulations* clatters and stomps with virile urgency. Combining doom's monolithic potency with elements as varied as pedal steel and viola, these tracks are as innovative as they are catchy. Like the mountains that surround them, *Lux* is harsh and unyielding, yet captivating at every turn.

FOR FANS OF: Wayfarer, Green Druid, Spelljammer

JOE DALY

Dana Dentata goes rogue from Rivendell

DANA DENTATA
pantychrist
ROADRUNNER

Toronto's rap/metal warrior sharpens her teeth

PANTYCHRIST BEGINS WITH a distorted synth, a fuzzy guitar and an anguished scream. Previously of the metal band Dentata, the provocative singer, rapper and visual artist has stepped out on her own a second time, using a mix of glitch, trap and nu metal to fulfil her desire to disgust and provoke. Much like her hero, Plasmatics singer Wendy O Williams, Dentata's personality and her music are impossible to separate, performing with a blood-covered spade echoing Wendy's infamous chainsaw.

The first solo female artist to sign to Roadrunner Records, Dentata blends Catholic imagery with explorations of bodily autonomy, mental health struggles and overcoming self-doubt. On the opening title-track Dana depicts herself as a Christ-like figure overcoming her demons to resurrect and return to the fray.

Occasionally straying a little close to Rob Zombie-esque schlock, although with a knowing glint, Dentata manages to walk along a razor's edge for most of the album's runtime. *Zipper Aches* is a terrifying track about the need to get out of your body – possibly inspired by Dana's time in the modelling industry – the minimalism of the instrumentation allowing her dynamic vocal performance to tell the story to captivating effect. Themes of domestic violence (*Manic Monday*'s *'When the man that you fear / Is the man that you feed'*) brings her work closer to that of Lingua Ignota than one might expect from an industrial rapper.

Previously hailed by Marilyn Manson as the next big thing, Dana Dentata's art is ironically the very antithesis of everything he's come to represent. *pantychrist* condemns masculine violence by meeting it head on with equally brutal feminine rage.

FOR FANS OF: Black Dresses, Poppy, Ghostemane

ROSIE ESTHER SOLOMON

PRESS

Employed To Serve offer another counter-strike

EMPLOYED TO SERVE

Conquering

SPINEFARM

Woking's metalcore aggressors discover a new groove

ON THE TITLE track of their last album, 2019's *Eternal Forward Motion*, Employed To Serve frontwoman Justine Jones screamed, *'There is no time to worship yesterday!'* The lyric was meant to summarise the millennial/Gen Z condition: having to work tirelessly for opportunities thanks to elder generations hoarding power. However, it can just as readily be applied to the band themselves, who've only refined their metalcore with every battering dished out. *Conquering*'s manifesto is the polar opposite. Kneeling at the altar of American groove metal, this fourth full-length indulges its creators' nostalgia for Lamb Of God and early Machine Head. In the process it becomes their most surprising aural assault, without sacrificing any of the mosh-inciting bedlam we all crave.

Opener *Universal Chokehold* demonstrates the new arsenal in use. A gentle guitar melody gradually escalates, embellished by strings and swelling percussion, before descending into a cavalcade of screeching riffs. Guitarist Sammy Urwin completes his transition to co-lead singer, darting off Jones's wails with both growls and hoarse cleans. Following a wah-wah-powered solo, a breakdown worthy of *Burn My Eyes*-style pummels.

The metallic ragers just keep torrenting. Jones and Urwin roar in unison over *Sun Up To Sundown*'s stomping sludge, while the muddy shred that commences *Mark Of The Grave* feels freshly plucked from Willie Adler's fretboard. *World Ender* subsequently strips back to only the most basic of heavy music necessities: slow chugs and a marching drum beat. The apex, though, comes from *The Mistake*, gleefully diving into death metal and exploding with blastbeats and tremolo picking.

For metalheads who aren't yet sold on Employed To Serve's unstinting aggression, there's no better jumping-on point than right here. *Conquering* proves they can reminisce just as well as they drive forward, opening up a plethora of options for past sounds that they can recreate – but nastier.

FOR FANS OF: Chimaira, Sharptooth, Slipknot

MATT MILLS

KADABRA

Ultra

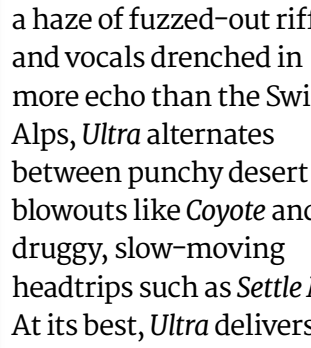
HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Spokane psych rockers flit between tribute and transcendence

Though formed in 2020, Kadabra sound like they've been excavated from a smoky garage, littered with bongs, lava lamps and paisley tapestries. Through a haze of fuzzed-out riffs and vocals drenched in more echo than the Swiss Alps, *Ultra* alternates between punchy desert blowouts like *Coyote* and druggy, slow-moving headtrips such as *Settle Me*. At its best, *Ultra* delivers some truly transcendental moments, courtesy of Garrett Zanol's stinging guitar leads and some full-on rock tempos. At other times, the songs feel *too* reverential to early 70s psych to be memorable. Still, with headphones and solitude, *Ultra* has the power to access colourful new realms.

FOR FANS OF: Blue Cheer, Lucifer, Nebula

JOE DALY



LLNN

Unmaker

PELAGIC

Dystopian Danes perfect another post-metal purge

2018's *Deads* saw LLNN take post-metal to its most excruciating recesses, and the Danes' third album makes every effort to crawl in further. Slowing the tempo and toning down the hardcore aggression, *Unmaker* is an oppressively dense monolith, delivering a pulverising wall of sound through every bleak chord, shuddering beat and Christian Bonnesen's hellish vocals. There's a heavier reliance on the synths and, taking cues from dystopian games and cinema, they help the likes of *Scion* and *Division* to paint a harrowing tapestry. But among the raw, unrelenting catharsis, bright, fleeting melodies shimmer in the background. *Obsidian*'s riffs even have the audacity to be catchy, providing glimpses where *Unmaker* is slightly less impenetrable.

FOR FANS OF: Neurosis, Celeste, Cult Of Luna

ADAM REES

LVCIFYRE

The Broken Seal

DARK DESCENT

Evil spells and deathly deeds from the dark depths

The stench of the abyss fills the nostrils from the first seconds of Lvcifyre's third album. Forged in the shadows of underground ignominy, *The Broken Seal* belongs squarely in the blackened, occult death metal realm, but with a prevailing atmosphere of unknowable hostility. *Gods Await Us* provides a startling entry point, with its churning, post-Immolation riffs and fractal percussive clatter, while *Tribe Of Khem* is a masterclass in bilious brevity. But the real meat in Lvcifyre's infernal soup arrives with the more expansive likes of *The Wolf Of The Great Dark* and towering *Black Mass*, wherein this hellbound trio embrace horrified, ritual doom on a wild, vari-speed descent into madness. Abandon all hope and dig in.

FOR FANS OF: Immolation, Grave Miasma, Teitanblood

DOM LAWSON

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

VARIOUS ARTISTS

This Wretched Earth: A Global Black Metal Compilation

SNOW WOLF

Snow Wolf records, an indie label based in Kentucky, USA, proudly present a black metal compilation that's ambitious in scope, featuring 16 bands from 14 countries across six continents. The hissing fury of **OF TWO LANDS** makes for an early statement of intent – one of two Egyptian representations alongside the buzzsaw blasphemy of **LYCOPOLIS**. The sonic and cultural diversity across the album is impressive. Hailing from Iran, **AKVAN**'s genuinely haunting atmospheres complement the second-wave striation of Malaysia's **GESTORVEN**. Chile's **FUNERAL** sound like weaponised hornets, the opposite of Colombians **MELABSTRA**'s symphonic melodrama. Greece's **ODYRMOS** reach for the stars with their dungeon synth, and India's **SOUNDS OF EMPTINESS** provide repose with minimalist funereal synth before Ukraine's **HAISSEM** deliver a muscular final blow. *This Wretched Earth* unifies the human diaspora with the one thing we all have in common: suffering. A far cry from polished modern black metal, this is a bold and ambitious testament to the fertility of the underground in 2021.

TOM O'BOYLE

PRESS

MAGGOT HEART/ OKKULTOKRATI
Maggot Heart/Okkultokrati
RAPID EYE

Apocalyptic missives from two sides of the punk underground

This disparate split EP comes on the heels of a pre-COVID Scandinavian tour during which the two bands got on like a house on fire. On the one hand/side, there's the Maggot Heart combining a Lower East Side, beatnik poetry lyrical approach with skonky Sonic Youth-meets-Gravity Records sounds. In three fell swoops, MH unnerve and shake hips, as guitar leads break down into chaos and Linnéa Olsson simultaneously summons the seductive coo of Coven's Jinx Dawson and the end of the world. Norway's Okkultokrati lumber down a darker path, sounding like Judas Priest's *Love Bites* covered at an arena-sized post-punk festival. The myopic, plodding pace doesn't generate much excitement, but downpicked guitars and eerie keyboard layers work to make *Candlemas Eve* worthy of its songtitle.

FOR FANS OF: Drive Like Jehu, Sisters Of Mercy, Type O Negative

CONNIE GORDON

ESTER SEGARRA

MASTIFF
Leave Me The Ashes Of The Earth
EONE

Hull sludgecore quartet lose all remaining hope on album three

2019's *Plague* was a breakthrough for Mastiff, with their sickeningly heavy fusion of sludge metal and hardcore (d)evolving into an even nastier and more primitive sound. They've outdone themselves again, sounding bleaker and even more crushing. Shorter tracks like *Midnight Creeper* and *Beige Sabbath* meld grinding blastbeats and humongous, lumbering breakdowns, like Nails if they'd recruited Kirk Windstein on second guitar. Meanwhile, longer pieces like *Repulse* and *Futile* allow enough room for those despondent doomy riffs to really seep under your skin. *Endless*'s thunderous and blistering tremolo riffs adopt a more of death metal sound and seven-minute closer *Lung Rust* is the album's most oppressive moment – a cold, slimy vortex of noise that provides a perfectly desolate finale.

FOR FANS OF: Crowbar, Nails, Leeched

KEZ WHELAN

MONO
Pilgrimage Of The Soul
PELAGIC

Japan's revered post-rock veterans diffuse and delight

Three decades in, these Japanese experimentalists return with their 11th studio outing, recorded and mixed with longtime collaborator Steve Albini. On earlier efforts, Mono hewed to the post-rock pathways of the late 90s, weaving delicate soundscapes into walls of pure, pulverising metal. Here, they rely far less on using that contrast to build tension. Instead, they draw from the cinematic power of long compositions, painting wide-open spaces with shimmery electronica and bold flourishes of strings that gradually pull you in with tractor-beam intensity. Devastating metallic catharses happen sparingly, and to devastating effect, on *Riptide* and *Hold Infinity In the Palm Of Your Hand*. Other tracks, like the superb *Heaven In A Wild Flower*, completely forego the shock factor in favour of velvety, mood-elevating soundscapes. Subtle, unpretentious and sneakily compelling.

FOR FANS OF: Explosions In The Sky, Mogwai, Godspeed You! Black Emperor

JOE DALY

NUNSLAUGHTER
Red Is The Color Of Ripping Death
HELLS HEADBANGERS

Cleveland's Devilish diehards deliver a demonic doozy

Thanks to Nunslaughter, the Devil has all the best tunes in both quality *and* quantity. Active since the mid-80s, Don Of The Dead's anti-Christian crew have pursued a purposefully myopic path, refining but never redefining their self-proclaimed "devil metal" across an absurd number of underground releases. Weirdly, *Red Is The Color Of Ripping Death* is only the band's sixth full-length studio album, but it's also their most brutal and sonically potent yet. More firmly rooted in death metal than ever before, songs like *Broken And Alone* and *Beware Of God* stick to the scabby basics, delivering blow after bloody blow to the face of the Creator and stomping on the crumpled remains, as lobotomised but lethal riffs scream in from all angles and Don spews vitriol like only a lifelong thorn in Christ's side can.

FOR FANS OF: Sarcófago, Possessed, Autopsy

DOM LAWSON

Katatonia eke out all the shades of gloom

KATATONIA
Mnemosynean
PEACEVILLE

Swedish gloomlords dig into three decades' worth of hidden gems

KATATONIA HAVE WORN many cloaks in their 30-year career. Roots in the world of doom – and death/doom – saw them steadily evolve their gothic inclinations, stripping away some of the early extremity while discovering the oceans-deep pool of prog in which to immerse themselves. This new b-sides and oddities collection explores their three-decade span in an enormous two-disc collection culled from EPs, singles, bonus tracks and outtakes across their career.

Astonishingly, it makes a remarkably cohesive collection. Rather than feeling like disjointed odds'n'sods have been parcelled together and pushed out for the hardcore fans, *Mnemosynean* serves as an alternative roadmap through the band's expansive career. Kicking off with bonus tracks from 2016's *The Fall Of Hearts*, the album runs in backwards chronology, capturing the major beats of Katatonia's career while shining a light on some lesser-loved gems.

While there is no dearth of quality to be found across the two-disc set, there are nonetheless standout songs that command attention. *Wide Awake In Quietus* comes off like an intersection of *Damnation*-era Opeth and romantic goth rockers Him. Elsewhere, *Ashen*, *Sulfur* and *Fractured* are thunderous reminders of Katatonia's ties to the 90s Peaceville doom scene, every bit as crushing as recent Paradise Lost or My Dying Bride releases.

Enormous stylistic left-turns are rare. *Scarlet Heavens* is as directly Sisters Of Mercy-style goth as the band get, but otherwise *Mnemosynean* mostly switches between the use of roaring guitar, thrumming electronica, as on *Unfurl*, or light synth/symphonics (*Second*, *The Act Of Darkening*) to establish the evolution in sound. Ultimately, *Mnemosynean* is less interested in uncovering stylistic curios as it is reclaiming the songs that were never got their chance to shine. If Katatonia's 11-album discography feels daunting, consider this a backdoor 'Greatest Hits' for fan-favourites that never were.

FOR FANS OF: Opeth, Paradise Lost, Anathema

RICH HOBSON

KK's Priest get messianic about heavy metal

KK'S PRIEST
Sermons Of The Sinner
EX1

Judas Priest's unforgettable axeman finally returns to the metal fray

KK DOWNING'S DEPARTURE from Judas Priest is still one of the saddest, most confusing sagas in metal. After devoting his adult life to the band that he co-founded in 1969, co-writing many of metal's best-loved and most important songs, his projects since 2011 have betokened a man in restless search of new directions. He's founded Wolverhampton's Steel Mill venue and the webzine of the same name, and even released his own range of fragrances. It's taken 10 years, but with *Sermons Of The Sinner* he's finally remembered what he's best at: heavy metal, duh.

KK always spoke very highly of Tim 'Ripper' Owens, whose records with Judas Priest unfortunately coincided with a period in the artistic and commercial doldrums for the band. His commanding pipes have well served many smaller-scale projects and guest spots since, but his phenomenal voice deserves a definitive vehicle – and KK's Priest is as much a showcase for Ripper's blood-curdling, multi-tracked shrieks and snarls as for Downing's tasteful but flamboyant solos and catchy, down-to-earth riffing. KK also wanted to bring in Les Binks (Priest drummer 1977-79); his contribution was waylaid by injury, but it's hard to imagine a septuagenarian nailing such high-speed double-bass and pummelling tom rolls. KK's Priest is intrinsically a top-tier no-bullshit power metal band, but the uproarious attack of Wacken-baiting gems like *Hellfire Thunderbolt*, *Metal Through And Through* and *Raise Your Fists* is counter-pointed against darker, quieter, more reflective moments; witness the title track's surprisingly wistful, melancholic mid-section, and the atmospheric acoustic coda to audacious epic closer, *Return Of The Sentinel*. It's not all gold; *Brothers Of The Road* is a cheesy roadie ditty that knowingly pilfers from *You Got Another Thing Comin'* – but KK has dropped a helluva heavy gauntlet here. Great news, folks: there are two Priests now.

FOR FANS OF: Judas Priest, Iced Earth, Hammerfall

CHRIS CHANTLER

ONE STEP CLOSER
This Place You Know
RUN FOR COVER

Pennsylvania's fast-rising hardcore talents prove their worth

Founded in 2016, this talented hardcore crew gained fans fast, but it was 2019's *From Me To You* EP that saw them shift into more uniquely compelling, melodic territory. Their first full-length builds on this with 10 heavy, well-structured and cleanly recorded tracks rooted in hardcore spirit and bursting with memorable riffs and unfaltering passion. Ryan Savitski's near-spoken yells are raw, pained and fervent, and the urgency in *Lead To Gray* and *Leave Me Behind* is gripping. With layered fretwork and harmonies, and even a beautifully rugged ballad, this is a dynamic and honest offering that does the band absolute justice.

FOR FANS OF: Title Fight, Defeater, Have Heart

NIK YOUNG

A PALE HORSE NAMED DEATH
Infernum In Terra
STEAMHAMMER/SPV

Former Type O/Life Of Agony drummer looks to his dark past

Having played in Life Of Agony and Type O Negative, Sal Abruscato knows a thing or two about making achingly melodic, doom-laden heavy music. His band's fourth album is a beautiful nod to his past, combining the gothic noir of Type O and the fragile introspection of LOA with a bunch of other alt-metal influences. *Shards Of Glass* takes the Jerry Cantrell guitar sound and paints pitch-black walls around it, while *Slave To The Master* feels like Sabbath, Danzig and Bauhaus playing Russian Roulette. You could grumble that *Infernum...* is a little too wedded to its 80s and 90s influences to truly bring anything new to the table, but it's fantastic to hear something truly, darkly gothic again.

FOR FANS OF: Paradise Lost, Type O Negative, Danzig

STEPHEN HILL

PHINEHAS
The Fire Itself
SOLID STATE

SoCal metalcore crew make an emotional connection to the 00s

Nodding firmly to 00s metalcore, this SoCal crew know how to mix aggression with atmospheric calms and heady melodies. The result is both emotional and hugely memorable. Slowly unfurling among swathes of gentle acoustics, *Eternally Apart* not only sets the self-reflective tone, drawing upon isolation and depression, but serves as a particularly hooky example of the quartet's dual vocal power that comes courtesy of Sean McCulloch. *Defining Moments* showcases their love of techy riffs and thundering drum kicks, while penultimate track *Severed By Self Betrayal* combines a little bit of everything, highlighting Phinehas's ability to breathe fresh life into melodic metalcore. Album number five pours its vulnerable heart out in wholly authentic style.

FOR FANS OF: August Burns Red, Bury Tomorrow, Fit For A King

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

PRESS

PORTRAIT
At One With None
METAL BLADE

Sweden's Mercyful Fatalists finally complete their emancipation

Portrait debuted in 2008, a year after King Diamond's last studio album. Metal fans became so starved of Kingly activity in the 10s that bands like In Solitude, Ghost and Attic emerged paying meticulous creative tribute to Satan's favourite Dane. Precocious Swedes Portrait were right on the advance wave, tackling the onerous task of replicating Mercyful Fate's magic ingredients with audacious aplomb. Portrait expanded their repertoire to admit bits of Dio, Priest and 80s US power metal, and this fifth album joyfully ramps up the Maiden-esque gallop and battlefield atmospheres. Crucially, however, Portrait are reaching for quirkier, more unorthodox riffs and guileless, gut-level arrangements. The King is now barely a spectral echo, Per Lengstedt seizing his own vocal identity just as the band finds its own space amongst metal's big legacy beasts.

FOR FANS OF: Mercyful Fate, Iron Maiden, Judas Priest

CHRIS CHANTLER

THE RAVEN AGE
Exile
EX1

Live, unplugged and new tracks from London's prodigal sons

While it's easy to chastise The Raven Age due to guitarist George being the son of Steve Harris, the fact that the Londoners have managed to thrive in front of Maiden's notoriously difficult crowds is itself worthy of recognition. And so it shows on this odds'n' sods compilation's four live tracks, each displaying the requisite punch and melodic clout. It's also a testament to the band's songwriting nous that several tracks from last album, *Conspiracy*, hold up well under the unplugged treatment. In the same acoustic vein come new tracks *Wait For Me* and *No Man's Land*. Clearly inspired by the anthemic radio rock of tourmates Shinedown, the simplified approach suits Matt James's vocals and might be a sign of things to come.

FOR FANS OF: Tremonti, Shinedown, Killswitch Engage

ADAM REES

REPLICANT
Malignant Reality
TRANSCENDING OBSCURITY

Ontological terrorism from the USDM depths

New Jersey trio Replicant may have created one of death metal's sleeper 'hits' of 2021 with their latest missive – a chugging beast of a record that balances complexity with catchiness, technicality with groove and brutality with sheer artfulness. *Malignant Reality* is so self-contained and consistent that it takes a few listens to fully appreciate all of its interlocked components. Take *Chassis Of Deceit* for example; the kinetic flow of the music is so impeccably managed, so infectious, it initially defies the listener's impulse to analyse. Also noteworthy is the band's incorporation of alien textures amid the constantly mutating riffage – Mike Hill's spoken word and Ben Karas's violin on *The Ubiquity Of Time*, Cody McCorry's theremin on *Caverns Of Insipid Reflection* – without losing an ounce of nihilistic heaviness.

FOR FANS OF: Gorguts, Tomb Mold, Imperial Triumphant

JOSEPH STANNARD

RIVERS OF NIHIL
The Work
METAL BLADE

Tech-death maestros grind their way to the upper echelons

If anyone tells you albums are redundant in today's Spotify playlist age, these Pennsylvanians should shut them up. *Where Owls Know My Name* was such an odyssey – integrating avant-garde structures, saxophones and psych rock into death metal – that fans demanded it be performed live in full. Three years later, *The Work* is not only more progressive than that magnum opus, it's again essential from front to back. Initially episodic, it starts by presenting clashing soundscapes. *The Tower* is predominantly breathy rock, ambient and clean-sung, before *Dreaming Black Clockwork* resurrects the intricate muscularity we're accustomed to. Those extremes are married in increasingly elaborate ways throughout, peaking with the leap from *Maybe One Day* to *Terrestria IV: Work*, where acoustic guitars transition into a tech death giant. Now responsible for two consecutive master-works, Rivers Of Nihil are fast becoming the kings of longform metal-writing.

FOR FANS OF: Black Crown Initiate, Between The Buried And Me, Kardashev

MATT MILLS

Al Jourgensen takes the raccoon threat seriously

DERICK SMITH/PRESS

MINISTRY
Moral Hygiene
NUCLEAR BLAST

Mad Al Jourgensen keeps playing his Trump card

FORTY YEARS. FOURTEEN albums. Death, drugs, drinking through dick piercings and a near-military campaign against some raccoons in his back garden. Whatever Al Jourgensen does, and by extension what Ministry does, it's well hard.

The 15th entry in his industrial metal oeuvre finds Uncle Al in a curious spot. Just like the band's post-millennial tirades against then-US President George W Bush, the past few years have been spent flinging shit at Donald Trump. The pile-on continues, taking aim at a former head of state now banned from Twitter and itching for a 2024 re-election. It's too acerbic to slide into 'Old Man Yells At Cloud' territory, but The Donald's constant presence, largely in the form of spliced-up samples, creates an uncanny listening vacuum that feels out-of-date to casual, er, fans of politics.

Musically, *Moral Hygiene* has no trouble peacocking its toupee and fake tan. Bigly. Traditional Middle Eastern instrumentation and harmonica pop up as per, and *TV Song #6* flaunts the staccato, thrashy abrasion you came for. That familiarity's used as foil for *Sabotage Is Sex*; stirring chords and soprano backing vocals fight against ex-Dead Kennedy Jello Biafra, deploying his full vibrato atop swelling choral drama and Wild West whistling. It's properly moving, as is the lift in *Believe Me*, where Al's poppier past life is revisited, albeit briefly, firing symphonic keys and acoustic guitars into the chorus like R.E.M. stepping on a landmine.

Of course, it still ticks the Ministry boxes; Al's flangy vocals sound like he's shouting into the same old goldfish bowl. But aside from lead single *Alert Level* and a gain-hungry cover of The Stooges' *Search And Destroy*, he's often employed as texture rather than slogan-a-minute assaults. While the record dips after *Believe Me*, there's still enough for diehards. Plus, it's going to absolutely bang live, innit?

FOR FANS OF: Rammstein, KMFDM, Killing Joke

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

Sleep Token's Vessel aims for a new high

SLEEP TOKEN

This Place Will Become Your Tomb

SPINEFARM

UK's shadowy collective keep flowering at the edge of the metal universe

IN JUST FIVE years, Sleep Token have become one of the most divisive bands in modern metal (if they even *are* a metal band). Some see their anonymous masked image as an essential part of their mystique, others view it as a cynical marketing ploy. Some see their music as a spiritual euphoric blend of soft electronics and heavy guitars, while others bemoan their songs as variations on an overused theme. Some embrace their references to gigs as 'rituals' or songs as 'offerings', while others dismiss such language as pretentious nonsense. But even detractors can't deny that Sleep Token have a strong, individualistic sound, albeit one that oftentimes threatened to tip over into a repeated formula across their earlier material. *This Place Will Become Your Tomb* goes some way towards addressing this without throwing away the elements that make them such an idiosyncratic proposition in the first place.

Distraction's looping piano motif and orchestral swells share similar DNA with Radiohead's early 00s cut-and-paste experiments, and the dark burbling undertones of *Descending* aren't a million miles away from Massive Attack. Organic Rhodes synths and a slow-hand Eric Clapton-esque guitar solo offer unexpected detours on *Telomeres*, a song that may be the band's most uplifting 'offering' yet. Some of the deviations don't land; the largely a cappella, autotuned *Fall For Me* aims for Bon Iver-style grandeur but ultimately falls flat, but the fact that Sleep Token are willing to evoke the indie-folk troubadour one moment while aping Meshuggah's guitar tone the next is cause for celebration, not consternation.

Sleep Token may be more divisive than Marmite, but initially at least, the greatest bands – System Of A Down, Slipknot, Ghost – often are. *This Place Will Become Your Tomb* hasn't cemented their place among the greats quite yet, but it has brought them one step closer.

FOR FANS OF: Radiohead, Loathe, The Cinematic Orchestra

REMFRY DEDMAN

SKEPTICISM

Companion

SVART

Finnish funeral doom originals return from internal exile

As pioneers of the form, Skepticism know that funeral doom is akin to a solemn walk in the deepest forest under a moonless night. Yet, armed with their ever-dominating organ and timpani-like drums, their 30-year journey is starting to allow the faintest traces of light to shine through. Since *Ordeal*, their last studio effort six years ago, they've abandoned winter's darkest nights for the eerie stillness preceding the dawn. *Companion* is achingly slow and extreme, but if you put aside the one guitar-driven – and, actually, less exciting – doom/death track, *Passage*, this could actually be their most accessible work yet. In their own very Finnish way, that is.

FOR FANS OF: Thergothon, Shape Of Despair, My Dying Bride

OLIVIER BADIN

STILL

{ }

TREPANATION RECORDINGS

Imaginatively harrowing post-BM from the Hull/Hades borderlands

After a promising demo and EP, Still's distinctive sound feels remarkably well-realised on this debut album, blending atmospheric black metal with gloomy post-metal. Avoiding the warmer, more shoegazey style of some post-black metal, there's an anxious and uncomfortable vibe throughout *{ }*. It's especially obvious on caustic opener *Droves*, as angular melodies flow across bristling blastbeats like a stream over jagged rocks, but it's present even during softer moments like the tense *We Were Ghosts (All Along)*, marrying subtle Slint-style guitar lines to churning Cult Of Luna-esque bass grooves. This is a powerful debut from a band that could become one of the most unique voices in the UK's fertile black metal scene.

FOR FANS OF: Oathbreaker, Bosse-De-Nage, Botanist

KEZ WHELAN

SUCCUMB

XXI

THE FLENSER

California's literate death metallers demand submission

To press Play on the second album from this San Francisco outfit is to submit yourself to a sonic avalanche. There's no fancy intro, no atmospheric easing into the proceedings, simply crushing death from above in the form of opener *Lilim* – an airless mesh of drums, vocals, bass and guitars. For all vocalist Cheri Musrasrik's apparent enthusiasm for "Yeats, Genet and Zola", the music here is resolutely non-artsy – save perhaps for the bleak descending drone that concludes *Smoke* – and utterly pummelling: a stroboscopic series of body blows without respite. Special mention must go to Jack Shirley, whose recording expertise enables the band to seethe with the lustre of darkest obsidian.

FOR FANS OF: Ulcerate, Cobalt, Suffocation

JOSEPH STANNARD

ANDY FORD/PRESS

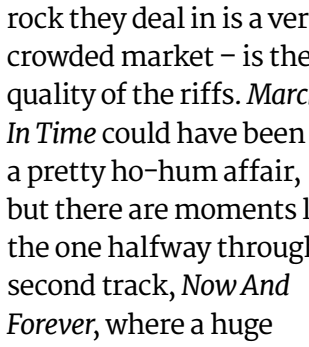
TREMONTI
Marching In Time
NAPALM

Alter Bridge/Creed axeman rises above the hard rock masses

Mark Tremonti is undeniably two things: a busy lad who's managed to get five solo albums out while also playing in both Alter Bridge and Creed, and a modern guitar hero. What sets most Tremonti albums apart from the crowd – and the kind of radio hard rock they deal in is a very crowded market – is the quality of the riffs. *Marching In Time* could have been a pretty ho-hum affair, but there are moments like the one halfway through second track, *Now And Forever*, where a huge polyrhythmic riff comes crashing in to elevate everything. Tremonti himself has a decent voice and surrounds himself with a capable and unfussy band who are capable of serving these enjoyable arena-ready bangers. But it's the star quality of the mainman's nimble fingers that really make this worthwhile.

FOR FANS OF: Alter Bridge, Stone Sour, Sevendust

STEPHEN HILL



VULVODYNIA
Praenuntius Infiniti
UNIQUE LEADER

South African slammers stray too far into the outer limits

Having established themselves as one of their country's premier exports on their first two records, 2019's *Mob Justice* cemented Vulvodynia as one of brutal death metal's leading lights. So quite why the South African sextet have crawled through a wondrous but whacky wormhole during lockdown is anyone's guess. The techy *The War Within* and *Forging The Deity Crusher* give their now triple-guitar assault ample opportunity to show its wizardry, and there's an abundance of ugly drops, blistering runs and Duncan Bentley's gurgling vocals. Telling the exhausting, 57-minute tale of inter-dimensional beings, *Praenuntius Infiniti* overflows with epilepsy-inducing dynamic changes and spacey sound effects throughout. Had they been used sparingly and sounded genuinely spooky instead of extremely silly, Vulvodynia could have conjured a kaleidoscopic sci-fi extravaganza, rather than an awkward soundtrack to an Ed Wood film.

FOR FANS OF: Rings Of Saturn, Arcania, Blood Incantation

ADAM REES

CHARLOTTE WESSELS
Tales From Six Feet Under
NAPALM

Former Delain frontwoman retunes herself to an alt-pop key

Since leaving Delain earlier this year, singer Charlotte Wessels has released a song every month, setting out her stall for the next chapter of her career. The tracks here are a surprising diversion. From melodramatic pop on *Superhuman* to a twinkling cover of goth classic *Cry Little Sister* and *Lizzie*, a haunting, string-led collab with Alissa White-Gluz, little here could be classed as rock. These are unfussy, alt-pop songs, deliberately stripped back to give Charlotte the spotlight. Without all the galloping pomp of her previous band and with only closer *Soft Revolution* putting a guitar up front and centre, this might not hit the spot for symphonic metal fans. Instead, this is a record aimed at fans of Charlotte's striking vocals who will be intrigued to follow her down a path towards a new future.

FOR FANS OF: Delain, Tarja, Anette Olzen

DANNII LEIVERS

WRAITH
Undo The Chains
REDEFINING DARKNESS

Indiana's speed metal maniacs spit gravel at the classics

Wraith don't undo any figurative chains on their third album – unsurprising seeing as blackened thrash is a subgenre steeped in nostalgia. Flitting between the NWOBHM excess of Bewitcher and Hellripper's giddy punk blasts, they career between solos, shout-along choruses and mid-tempo breaks. But where Hellripper polish those tropes, Wraith are determined to construct the 80s throwback you deserve after sitting through years of synthwave. Aside from Matt Sokol's warped, multi-layered growls, this is a 32-minute pedalo tour of the classics. *Mistress Of The Void* channels Motörhead-style rock'n'roll, *Cloaked In Black* is *Ride The Lightning*-era Metallica huffing early Celtic Frost, and *Disgusting* offers vintage Venom played by actual musicians. Previous record *Absolute Power* rattled with more urgency, but this is still devilishly fun. Disengage your brain and enjoy.

FOR FANS OF: Hellripper, Bewitcher, Midnight

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

Unto Others rise from their crypt

UNTO OTHERS
Strength
ROADRUNNER

Goth/metal's most adept fusionists undergo a glorious resurrection

A NEW BEGINNING for a band who'd only just begun, Unto Others is the equally intriguing (but much better) new name for Idle Hands – the time-warped lovechildren of a perfectly balanced goth rock/heavy metal union. The Portland, Oregon quartet's 2019 debut, *Mana*, was one of the most immediate assertions of distinction in recent rock history. The class and character of the band – or more specifically, guitarist/vocalist and bandleader Gabriel Franco – was instantly evident, each earworm-laden hook digging into the listener with such force that by the third spin you could have sworn you'd known these songs for years.

It was always going to be a tough record to outdo, but with the increased visibility afforded by a Roadrunner deal and a new bandname (in the same cobwebbed serifs), *Strength* is indeed a strong introduction to the band's singular modus operandi. At first the smoother, fuller sound feels like it may have removed a little too much grit from the sonic fingernails, even though the metal shapes being thrown here reach for slightly more modern and intense vibes than *Mana*'s predominating NWOBHM-level weight and pace. Unleashing the double bass drums and speedy downstrokes has made *Strength* less of a concerted time-capsule contrivance, with a more open and contemporary feel.

Apart from a few infectious exceptions (blood-shaking opener *Heroin*, stadium-sized sing-along *Hell Is For Children* and the ringing, propulsive melodies of *When Will Gods Work Be Done* [sic]), the hooks are often as memorable but less direct, requiring a few more spins to sink in. There's perhaps less of an indefinably magical, bottled-lightning quality than was evident on *Mana*, and Franco has confirmed there was an element of 'difficult second album syndrome' with *Strength*. It is, however, absolutely no slouch, and it continues the band's unique trajectory with increased maturity and depth.

FOR FANS OF: The Cure, Metallica, Paradise Lost

CHRIS CHANTLER

PETER BESTE/PRESS

LIVE REVIEWS

KILLSWITCH ENGAGE

THE PALLADIUM, WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts metalcore heroes revisit their highs and plateaus

Jesse Leach keeps up with the Joneses

THE WORCESTER PALLADIUM is a venue woven into Killswitch Engage's DNA. Back when the metalcore heroes were upstart East Coast punks, they performed their first ever show there, supporting Shadows Fall and In Flames. They played its annual New England Metal and Hardcore Festival seven times. Plus, it's where frontman Jesse Leach returned to the band onstage, ending a decade-long absence.

Tonight, the two-stage home turf hosts yet another career milestone. Not only is this Killswitch's debut livestream, but old collides with new as both their first album and latest, 2019's *Atonement*, are barrelled through in full.

The one-two punch of *Unleashed* into *The Signal Fire* threatens to steal the show at its outset. The opener is the ideal warm-up, trading the band's archetypical rampages for a prowler of a track, imbued with a creeping main riff. Following guitarist Adam D's jovial grunt of "Gimme a beat!", its high-octane follow-up is sadly Howard Jones-less, dismantling the tandem that made the single a headline-stealer. However, Jesse is in such savage form that he easily compensates; his declarations of *'The signal fire's alight!'* are more triumphant here than on record.

Following the thrash masterclass of *The Crownless King*, the set unfortunately suffers from the same affliction as *Atonement* itself; it's front-loaded as fuck. The live arena aggravates *Know Your Enemy* into anti-political ferocity, but *I Can't Be The Only One, Take Control* and *As Sure As The Sun Will Rise* are all meat 'n' potatoes Killswitch Engage. Later, *Bite The Hand That Feeds* isn't the sweltering conclusion it should be; it's not a grand finale as much as an unceremonious stop.

Greater personality shines as the quintet retreat upstairs, re-exploring their debut in an appropriately grungy attic. Suddenly donning camo shorts, blond wigs and dreadlocks in a 2000 throwback that's so accurate it's jarring, they explode into anthems more historically fascinating than they are exciting. The comparatively juvenile compositions unpick the Killswitch soundscape; while *Vide Infra* is transparent At The Gates worship, *Temple From Within*, with its breathy vocals and speeding chords, indulges their hardcore leanings.

If this stream was meant to juxtapose today's Killswitch with the imperfect aggressors of yore, then *Just Barely Breathing* is the perfect encore. Youthfully energetic yet brimming with earworm melodies, it's the ideal convergence between tonight's two extremes. Also, the fact that it blasts away memories of some earlier monotony only makes this ending all the sweeter.

MATT MILLS

PRESS

Killswitch return to their own ground zero

Adam D: wired for sound

Killswitch Engage offer a livestream of two halves

ONSLAUGHT
MEMORIAM/DECREPID
THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON

Despite doors opening before most folks will have left work, The Underworld is delightfully filled by the time **DECREPID** hit the stage. The band quickly set to shaking loose the cobwebs as they settle in for a full-force death metal assault. Being bludgeoned about the face and ears by blastbeats and snarls feels like a baptism of brutality, but crucially it also feels *right*.

MEMORIAM are no strangers to the festival circuit, but they become an entirely more potent beast when shifted to the confines of a club. The confines of The Underworld are a particularly appropriate setting for their cacophonous din, especially considering their usage of the old-school death metal method of grabbing the listener and *squeezing*. Opening on *Undefeated*, the band lock into their groove early on, eschewing pace in favour of vicious intensity.

Vocalist Karl Willetts' insistence on "Love, peace and respect" between songs belies some of the oppressive nastiness of his band, but also speaks to the sense of community earned in more than three decades as a death metal stalwart. Though Memoriam have by-and-large adopted his former band Bolt Thrower's predilection towards lumbering menace, songs like *This War Is Won* do amp the pace up, its frenzied breakouts feeling all the more frantic when set against the band's usual approach.

Compared to **ONSLAUGHT**, though, Memoriam may as well be moving through tar. New vocalist Dave Garnett has already proven his chops by this point – having fronted the band since 2020's *Generation Antichrist* – but his first club show with the band still feels special. After all, Onslaught have never worried themselves with breaking radio – their strain of thrash has always been hard, nasty and decidedly in league with down below.

With just an hour of stage time, the Bristolians scarcely pause for breath. *Killing Peace, 66'Fucking'6* and *Destroyer Of Worlds* come on like a blitzkrieg whilst retaining a Kreator-like ear for snarl-alongs. Seemingly growing stronger with each new release, the likes of *A Perfect Day To Die, Strike Fast Strike Hard* and *Religiousuicide* from *Generation Antichrist* are masterclasses in how to craft a song with as many barbs as it has hooks, even after almost 40 years. Such efforts don't go to waste; the front row belt out whole verses of *The Sound Of Violence* with joyous abandon. As Dave himself puts it, "It's fucking beautiful to be back."

RICH HOBSON

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PRIMORDIAL

SAOR/HELLRIPPER/FEN/THE INFERNAL SEA

THE GARAGE, LONDON

Ireland's exhilarating firebrands head up a black celebration

IT'S APT FOR a one-day black metal festival called Resurgence Ritual to open with **THE INFERNAL SEA**, since the masked enigmas seek to emulate a demonic summoning. However, with their raven robes and orthodox songwriting, everything they conjure up is in the shadow of their more sonically adventurous peers. A more dynamic offering is served by **FEN**, whose ominous melodies could soundtrack a spirit roaming the East Anglian flatlands. Post-rock elements are strewn throughout their blackgaze suites, ensuring that every breakdown lands like a cataclysm. They enthral for their entire set.

HELLRIPPER, on the other hand, are rowdy bastards. Who needs nuance when you can exhume first-wave black metal and reanimate it by jamming Motörhead levels of aggro up its arse? Their 40 minutes of Venom on meth unsurprisingly inspire an unyielding moshpit, kept alive by riffs and blastbeats torrenting like napalm. It's a fever pitch **SAOR** can't recreate. The Scotsmen's mission is to imbue metal with Highland melodies, but they never escape the archetypical black/folk trappings. Luckily, some promise is shown on their last song, as Lambert Segura's violins swell and invigorate London's hordes.

"We are **PRIMORDIAL** and we stand where greater men have fallen!" the headliners declare. Who can argue? Few bands in the British Isles' underground have consistently thrived for as long as these gloomy Celts. Although the depressive grandeur of their setlist allures, it's swiftly apparent that they live and die off the back of frontman Alan Averill. His wails and imposing charisma affirm him as the Bruce Dickinson of black/folk metal, while his acerbic wit is unleashed between songs. "When did we become a crowdsurfer band?" he grins as bodies fly over the barrier. Songs about the bloody course of history have rarely felt so triumphant.

MATT MILLS

Primordial: Alan Averill channels the (frog)march of history

JAKE OWENS

LEPROUS

NOTODDEN THEATER, NORWAY

It's another night for the diehards. Already during the last 12 months, Leprous have allowed fans to choose the setlist for a livestreamed show, written the perplexing *Nighttime Disguise* over a six-day Zoom session with fans and performed two well-loved albums – 2017's *Malina* and 2019's *Pitfalls* – in full.

Tonight, they're playing their genre-splicing seventh album, *Aphelion*, two days before its release in front of a socially distanced crowd, with many more watching online. It's another chance to lift the curtain and peek at the mechanics behind Leprous's progressive, cerebral world as they reveal the stories behind the new songs.

Things kick off with album opener *Running Low*, a song vocalist Einar Solberg reveals was written while travelling up a mountain. "It sounds more spectacular than it was," he chuckles, but even so, the song is stunning with Einar's goosebump-inducing falsetto in full flight amid plinky guitars and dramatic brass, as cellist Raphael Weinroth-Browne beams in remotely from his apartment. Bathed in a red glow, Norway's finest are backed by unfussy production with no visuals and simple lights. As a result, the evening feels intimate and unshowy, almost like the band have pitched up in your living room for a chinwag about the album over a beer. Relaxed and chatty, their between-song reveals are often self-deprecating and never sound rehearsed. At one point, Einar jokingly tells drummer Baard Kolstad to "put your phone away" when he catches him sending a cheeky text behind the kit.

For an album that's frequently denser and more musically diverse than 2019's *Pitfalls*, many of these tracks find their origins in those sessions. Einar explains *Silhouette*, with its jerky guitars and nimble, intricate drumming, was one of the earlier cuts written for *Pitfalls*, as was *The Shadow Side* and slow-builder *On Hold*. The towering *The Silent Revelation*, on the other hand, started life as "one of the worst sketches" for *Malina*. Fun facts like these are lapped up by Leprous fans, yet all the informalities can't mask *Aphelion*'s palpable majesty. Live isn't the best way to experience a Leprous album for the first time – theirs are songs that tend to unfurl their textures and intentions over repeated listens. But as closer *Nighttime Disguise* explodes in a thrilling pile-on of keys, brass and Einar's now-rare screams, once again we're left feeling like we've been handed the key to the mystifying world of one of heavy music's most masterful and enigmatic of operators.

DANNII LEIVERS

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Voices straddle the line between black metal and post-punk

VOICES

RED METHOD/LOST BRETHREN

THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

London marauders provide the yin and yang of extremity

Red Method put their best face forward

IT'S SUNDAY IN Camden, but it's also Bank Holiday weekend, so there is a healthy enough crowd for tonight's openers **LOST BRETHREN**, who, despite being a little rough around the edges, dish out some satisfyingly chunky death metal. The Black Heart can barely hold **RED METHOD**, though. The London oddities, featuring the pedigree of former members of The Defiled and Meta-Stasis amongst their ranks, are a visual and aural feast that is rarely seen in such modest surroundings. At first the PA struggles mean the band just sound like a soup of noise and some dudes cosplaying as American Head Charge circa 2002, but as the set progresses and the layers begin to separate, you can hear some real craft to what they're doing. It's particularly apparent as they perform a remixed version of their self-proclaimed "COVID anthem" *Slave To The New World Disorder*, which is full of menace, spooky soundscapes and an absolutely humongous riff that grooves like prime Pantera. By the time they leave a full-blown pit has opened up at the front and the reaction they receive as they take their bows suggest they have made a real impression.

If Red Method are the yin then **VOICES** are very much their yang. The former are lit in scarlet, and make music that's meaty, instant and dressed to impress. The latter, illuminated in a deep, dark blue and little else, are far more subtle and challenging. Voices' music is a puzzle; black metal, goth, post-punk, abstract, ambient noise and piston-like mechanical grinding all clip together in tandem to create something oddly unique, but utterly spellbinding. The band are so shrouded in darkness that you almost have to squint to see what is going on, but vocalist Peter Benjamin is the obvious focal point, leaning back and raising his hands skyward as his phenomenal shriek cuts through the chaos of their music.

Peter, hilariously, describes his charges as "A punk band from London", a descriptor that boils Voices down to their absolute base elements, especially when you hear the new song that they end the night with. Its blasting, swirling, psychedelic freak-out suggests that the new record they are sitting on could be one of 2021's most intriguing releases.

STEPHEN HILL

STU GARNEYS

FIVE MINUTES WITH GINGER WILDHEART

THE WILDHEARTS

The frontman on potential jail time, crowdfunding and horror movies

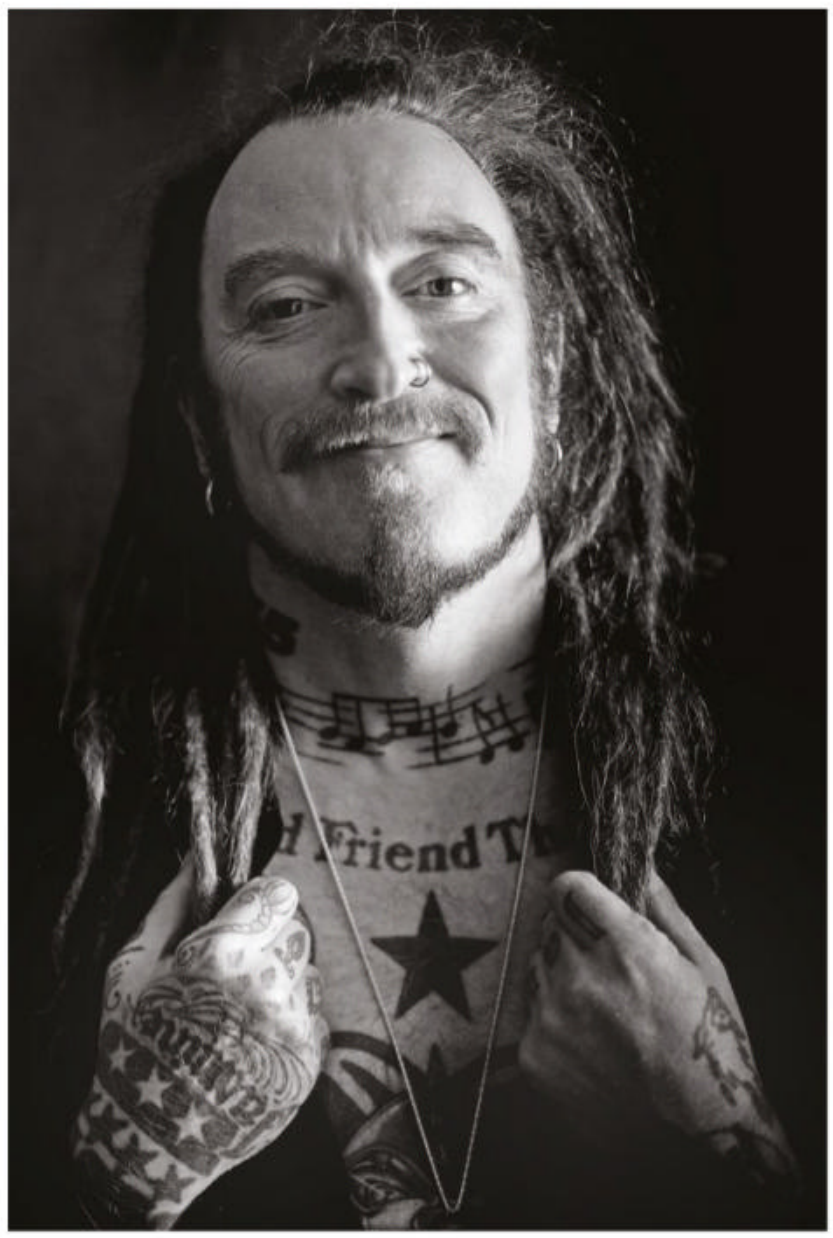
WORDS: RICH HOBSON

Straight away on The Wildhearts' new album *21st Century Love Songs*, you put paid to the idea that you grow softer with age…
"I've never understood that concept at all. Surely [as you age], you find things to be genuinely angry about, rather than when you're young and you're just angry about everything! I think angry people should get more adept at using anger with age, not chilling out and going the other way. So yeah – we're not mellowing out, and I don't trust people who *do* mellow out."

Lyrically, the album seems to catch you in quite a reflective mood, too.
"Well, *Remember These Days* came from looking at a picture of me and [Wildhearts guitarist] CJ jumping at the same time, and just missing playing live. There have been a lot of times in the past that have been terrible, but they've informed the people we are now. So it was written like, 'Remember *those* days.' Not just the good times, but the times that shaped who we'd become as people."

Over the years you've had a few brushes with the law. What inspired the new song *Sort Your Fucking Shit Out*?
"I was in a fight in Ireland and got three years' suspended sentence. It was an awful time; if anything else happens to you that's it, you're straight in court and you're going down. When lockdown first happened, shops were trying to establish the 'two-metres-apart' rule, which was fine until people got inside the shop and then it all went to shit, clumping together again. The one-way system didn't work, either. I got into a big barney in a store and the next thing I know I'm being arrested again and taken to court. At that point, I thought, 'This could be it, I could go down for a very long time – and deservedly so – because of my failure to monitor my emotions.' I thought, 'If I go down now, it's a valuable lesson and I'll need to have it.' But miraculously I *didn't* go down, and that became, 'OK, let's stay out of prison going forward.'"

"THE WILDHEARTS ARE THE RATS AND COCKROACHES OF ROCK'N'ROLL"



It's been almost a decade since you used crowdfunding to revitalise your career. Now we're seeing a lot of bands and artists going down that route via Patreon and the like. Is it something you feel more bands should adopt?
"The great time for Pledge[Music] was before the old CEOs of the record industry started coming in. To start with, Pledge was perfect for bands: you could have a small but passionate fanbase and make records specifically for them. It's great to see people going back to that, but as with anything else there are some people who will be absolute shitbags and charge money for something they don't deliver. I like to think the process of elimination will get rid of those people, as fans eventually get sick of it and stop giving them money."

You're a horror connoisseur. With Halloween around the corner, how do you feel about horror in the 2020s?
"It's great! I look forward to movies coming out and have a list of movies I'll look for, still getting regularly blown away. I love the traditional but forward-thinking aspect of horror. If you've got a bunch of people that don't already love horror then it's going to die, especially with the proliferation of CGI. People say, 'We don't need to make a mess of the room, we can just add gore in from CG.' But those that grew up with practical effects will look at that like deciding to have a CGI cum-shot in porn! Horror is much maligned and unfairly dismissed as being substandard, but that's because those critics don't get it. Every now and again a movie comes out that makes everything stop. I had that recently with this movie *Blood Red Sky*."

After 30 years of The Wildhearts, what's your proudest achievement?
"Not dying! That was never really a guarantee – it looked like one of us was going to go at some point. We're losing legs and teeth but we're still going, even with Covid. We really are the rats and cockroaches of rock'n'roll."

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